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What ambiguity there is in exalted things.

Don DeLillo, *The Names* (New York: Vintage Book, 1989), 3.

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The Past, Panegyric, and the Performance of Penmanship

Sultanic Biography and Social Practice in Late Medieval Egypt and Syria

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Abstract / Samenvatting

The Past, Panegyric, and the Performance of Penmanship: Sultanic Biography and Social Practice

Late Medieval Egypt and Syria

This dissertation evaluates a corpus of six sultanic biographies (*sīra*) written by Muḥyī al-Dīn b. ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir (d. 692 / 1293) and his nephew Shāfiʿ b. ʿAlī (d. 730 /1330). Both authors were prominent scribes at various courts of the late seventh / thirteenth and early eighth / fourteenth century (so-called Mamluk) sultanate of Cairo. The *sīra*'s discuss the lives and reigns of sultans Baybars (r. 658/1260-676/1277, two texts), Qalāwūn (r. 678/1279-689/1290, two texts), al-Ashraf Khalīl (r. 689/1290-693/1293, one text), and al-Nāṣir Muḥammad (r. 693/1293-694/1294, 698/1299-708/1309, 709/1309-741/1341, one text), although the historical coverage is incomplete due to not all manuscripts surviving in full. While five of these texts have been studied before in varying degrees of thoroughness (the sixth, a *sīra* of al-Nāṣir Muḥammad written by Shāfiʿ b. ʿAlī, is a new discovery made within the framework of this doctoral research), this dissertation proposes the first systematic and in-depth analysis of the full corpus of preserved *sīra*'s written by these two authors. It does so by taking into account the full complexity of their textual construction, giving equal attention to the historiographical accounts as to the documentary and poetical pieces contained within these wide-ranging texts, as well as to the material situation of the preserved manuscripts. The textual analysis is embedded within a thorough contextual understanding of political developments, social practice, and literary culture of the period, and understands these texts as communicative works that engaged in detail with these contexts. Instead of only looking at these works from an angle of sultans' projects of legitimisation and their (attempts at) establishment of personal or dynastic hegemony, as the majority of scholars have done so far, this study proposes a performative analysis of texts and contexts in which the many-sided processes of patronage and participation, individual authorship, intra-elite communication, and the reproduction of literary discourses on political legitimacy are taken into account.

Het Verleden, Lofprijzing, en het Opvoeren van Schrijfkunst: Sultanische Biografie en Sociale Praktijk in Laat-Middeleeuws Egypte en Syrië

Dit proefschrift onderzoekt een corpus van zes sultanische biografieën (*sīra*) geschreven door Muḥyī al-Dīn b. ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir (d. 692 / 1293) en diens neef Shāfiʿ b. ʿAlī (d. 730 /1330). Beide auteurs waren prominente klerken aan verscheidene hoven van het laat zevende/dertiende en vroeg achtste/veertiende eeuwse sultanaat van Cairo (beter bekend als het Mamloekensultanaat). De *sīra*'s beschrijven de levens en heerschappijen van sultans Baybars (r. 658/1260-676/1277, twee teksten), Qalāwūn (r. 678/1279-689/1290, twee teksten), al-Ashraf Khalīl (r. 689/1290-693/1293, een tekst), en al-Nāṣir Muḥammad (r. 693/1293-694/1294, 698/1299-708/1309, 709/1309-741/1341, een tekst), hoewel de uitvoerigheid van de historiografische verslaggeving verschilt al naargelang de sultan door de onvolledige attestatie van verscheidene manuscripten. Vijf van deze teksten zijn reeds bestudeerd in verschillende mate van diepgang (de zesde, een *sīra* gewijd al-Nāṣir Muḥammad geschreven door Shāfiʿ b. ʿAlī, is een nieuwe ontdekking gedaan in het kader van dit doctoraatsonderzoek), maar dit proefschrift geeft een eerste systematische en diepgaande analyse van het volledige corpus van beschikbare *sīra*'s geschreven door deze twee auteurs. Dit gebeurt door rekening te houden met de volledige complexiteit van hun tekstuele constructie, met evenredige aandacht voor de historiografische berichten en voor de documenten en gedichten die in deze breed opgezette teksten te vinden zijn, evenals de materiële toestand van de bewaarde manuscripten. De tekstuele analyse wordt ingebed in een doorgedreven contextueel begrip van politieke ontwikkelingen, sociale praktijk en literaire cultuur in de periode, en vormt een begrip van deze teksten als communicatieve werken die op allerlei manieren met deze contexten in dialoog gaan. In plaats van enkel naar deze teksten te kijken binnen de logica van sultanische projecten van legitimisatie en hun (pogingen tot) verankering van persoonlijke of dynastieke hegemonie, zoals de meeste onderzoekers reeds gedaan hebben, suggereert deze studie een performatieve analyse van teksten en contexten waarin de veelzijdige processen van patronage en participatie, individueel auteurschap, intra-elite communicatie, en de reproductie van literair discours over politieke legitimiteit in acht worden genomen.

Acknowledgements

The high-profile career of Shāfiʿ b. ʿAlī, one of this dissertation's two protagonists, probably only lasted for about four years: he rose to prominence during the sultanate of al-Saʿīd Bereke (r. 676 / 1277 – 677 / 1279) and was hit by an arrow in the head during the Battle of Homs in 680 / 1281 at the age of twenty nine, after which he is said to have become blind and more or less retired. Four years is a short time, but it provided him a wealth of anecdotes and official writings and a self-perception as *kātib* or "chancery clerk" which he would continuously reproduce and refer to to until his old age many years later.

Many things can pass in four years, and so it is with the time I spent researching and writing this PhD dissertation since October 2014, generously funded by the Special Research Fund (BOF) of Ghent University – fortunately these years have come to a much less dramatic end than those of our author. Throughout that period this project has changed course a number of times and narrowed its focus considerably. A reading of the *sīra*'s written by Ibn ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir and his nephew Shāfi b. ʿAlī was supposed to be the starting point for a more thorough engagement with diachronic biographical traditions about the sultans Baybars, Qalāwūn, and al-Nāṣir Muḥammad and the ways in which such traditions employed the "marvellous". Little did I know then that these were such complex texts and authors that I could devote an entire dissertation to just them, or that another undiscovered *sīra* was lying in wait.

I may count myself considerably lucky to have been guided and supported by a number of highly able supervisors and colleagues. Foremost among these is without a doubt *mawlā-nā* Jo Van Steenbergen, who has by now been supervising my research for nearly eight years – two preceding MA thesises and a BA paper at Ghent University – during which he has continuously provided me with perceptive feedback on early as well as very recent writings, proper suggestions on structure and argumentation, corrections of my translations, and likely about eighteen book cases of relevant publications to read through. It is safe to say that this dissertation would not be nearly as focused and informed as it is now without his thorough and consistent advice and support. I am deeply grateful for his guidance and trust over the years.

This research has furthermore benefited from the advice of two other members in my doctoral committee. In the initial research project Jan Dumolyn's supervisory role was much larger, but the narrowing down of the project eventually resulted in his role being somewhat auxiliary. Nevertheless, I have always encountered in him an enthusiastic co-supervisor who

supported the work I was doing and encouraged me to engage with the wider academic world beyond Mamluk studies. Konrad Hirschler also performed his role as external member of the advisory committee excellently, offering helpful feedback and many suggestions during a number of long and short conversations and in the feedback he formulated on some of my earlier writings. Many thanks to both.

Beyond the direct supervisory context, I owe gratitude to several colleagues. Kristof D'hulster had to endure many random and often highly difficult (if not unsolvable) questions due to his physical proximity at the neighbouring office desk – and of course his much-valued erudition! I am grateful for his diligence in helping with translations, references, as well as fresh perspectives on some writings he read through. For similar reasons I also owe gratitude to the ever-growing group of colleagues that worked in our office and who helped me by answering questions, giving feedback on papers, helping with translations, providing references, and by creating a nice atmosphere to work in. In more or less chronological order these are: Stijn Van Nieuwenhuyse, Veerle Adriaenssens, Maya Termonia, Mohammad Al Akach, Mohamad Maslouh, Yoachim Yeshaya, Fien De Block, Kenneth Goudie (to whom I owe a specific thanks for his corrections on an earlier draft of the introduction and first part of this dissertation), Zacharie Mochtari de Pierrepont, Tarek Sabraa, Aymon Kreil, Rihab Ben Othmen, Mustafa Banister, and Aymon Kreil. An extended thanks also to colleagues from the Slavonics research group for making lunch and coffee breaks a pleasant escape from the world of late medieval Arabic linguistic trickery. A number of other scholars both at graduate and faculty level from other departments and other universities will be thanked for specific reasons in footnotes throughout this dissertation, but special mention may here be made already of Frédéric Bauden for sharing many suggestions and insights with me after reading the initial version of this dissertation, as well as Wim Verbaal, Maaike van Berkel, Luke Yarbrough, Mohamad El-Merheb, Meia Walravens, and Leen Bervoets, who provided me with many assorted bits of advice and references. I would also like to thank the secretaries of our department, initially Hilde De Paepe and Karine Vandermarliere, but later also Sabine Van Cauwenberghe, Ann Wardenier, and Ayla Anckaert for their practical and technical help in many domains. A special word of gratitude is due to Gino Schallenbergh, to whom I owe part of my command of Arabic and whose presence is sorely missed.

A penultimate word of gratitude should be directed to people who supported me during this period outside of the world of academia by simply being there for me in various guises. My parents, for trusting in me more than ten years ago to just go study whatever I found interesting; my brothers and sisters (and a growing number of nieces and nephews); my close friends, roommates, fellow musicians, and travel companions for many talks, lunches, dinners, creative endeavours, and so on, for counterbalancing the cerebral contexts of university. Many things change across four years, and time, space, and feeling shift according to their own logic, but gratitude remains to Karolien and Eveline, and to Nadia and Elisabeth, for bearing with me during longer or shorter parts of this journey.

And then there is Rana, for whom I have altered the following line originally written by this dissertation's other great protagonist, Ibn ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir:

أيها اليار أنتِ عَوني وسكنا كِ بقلبي فلستِ عنه تغيبين

Note on transliteration and translation

I have followed the widely used *IJMES* (*International Journal of Middle East Studies*) system for the transliteration of Arabic. In keeping with that system I have not rendered the assimilation of sun letters. For translations of longer excerpts, I have always included a copy of the original Arabic text, either typed or by way of images from the manuscripts in those cases where the editions were especially problematic. In the copied excerpts I have sometimes taken the liberty to stray from the typography found in the editions by adjusting comma's and points where I thought those used in the editions were inappropriate or confusing. I have also always highlighted the use of rhymed prose by way of asterisks – a relatively common practice in Arabic manuscripts of the period, though not consistently in the texts studied here – which also deviates from most of the editions. A number of more fundamental differences in reading from the editions are noted in footnote. All translations from the Arabic (but also here and there from French, German, and Latin) are my own unless otherwise noted.

List of Abbreviations

BnF: Bibliothèque nationale de France

BL: British Library

BSOAS: Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London

EAL: Encyclopedia of Arabic Literature, eds. J.S. Meisami & P. Starkey (London: Routledge, 1998), 2 vols.

EI2: Encyclopaedia of Islam, Second Edition, eds. P. Bearman, T. Bianquis, C.E. Bosworth, E. Van Donzel, & W.P. Heinrichs (Leiden: Brill, 1954-2005), in http://www.referenceworks.brillonline.com/browse/encyclopaedia-of-islam-2

EI3: Encyclopaedia of Islam, Third Edition, eds. K. Fleet, G. Krämer, D. Matringe, J. Nawas, E. Rowson e.a. (Leiden: Brill, 2007-ongoing) in http://www.referenceworks.brillonline.com/browse/encyclopaedia-of-islam-3

EIr: Encyclopaedia Iranica eds. E. Yarshater, E. Daniel e.a., in http://www.iranicaonline.org

EQ: Encyclopaedia of the Qurʾān, ed. J. Dammen McAuliffe (Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2001), 6 vols.

IJMES: International Journal of Middle East Studies

JAOS: Journal of the American Oriental Society

JESHO: Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient

MSR: Mamluk Studies Review

ZDMG: Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft

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Introduction

قالَ لي من رأى صباح مشيبي عن شمال من لِمَّتي ويمين
أيُّ شيء هذا؟ فقلت مجيباً لَيلُ شكٍّ محاهُ صُبحُ يقين

He who saw the morning of my old age asked me
about the good and bad fortune of my hair lock:
"What is this thing?" So I told him in answer:
"A night of doubt being effaced by a certain dawn"[1]

On the seventeenth of Shaʿbān of the year 730 AH / June 5th 1330 CE, an old man died in Cairo.[2] Two years before his death, he apparently improvised the above quoted poem as part of a poetical exchange with the famous biographer Khalīl b. Aybak al-Ṣafadī (d. 764 / 1363) when the latter visited him in person. The meeting was fruitful: the two exchanged poems about old age – despite al-Ṣafadī being only thirty-two lunar years old at that point – and al-Ṣafadī received an extensive *ijāza* (a "permission" to transmit certain information on the authority of a specific person) containing several more of his

[1] Al-Ṣafadī, *Aʿyān al-aṣr wa-aʿwān al-naṣr,* ed. Abū Zayd a.o. (Beirut-Damascus: Dār al-fikr al-muʿāṣir & Dār al-fikr, 1998), vol. 2:505. The poem is also recorded in the independent biography given by Ibn Ḥabīb (d. 779/1378), *Tadkhirat al-nabīh fī ayyām al-Manṣūr wa-bānī-hi,* ed. Muḥammad Muḥammad Amīn (Cairo: al-Hayʾa l-Miṣriyya l-ʿāmma li-l-kitāb, 1976-86), vol. 2:209. The word I have translated as "old age" (*mashīb*) means more literally "grey hairs" and is thus intimately related to the hair lock of the second hemistych of the first *bayt* ("descending below the ear", A. de Biberstein Kazimierski, *Dictionnaire Arabe-Français* (Paris: Maisonneuve, 1860), vol. 2:1022), where an association is made between hair locks and fortune. The word *mashīb* also appears in al-Ṣafadī's own poem which triggered this response.

[2] Al-Ṣafadī, *Aʿyān al-aṣr,* 2:502. The old man was born 77 solar years earlier on the 25th of Dhū l-Ḥijja in 649 / March 27th 1252. This birth date is only mentioned by al-Nuwayrī (d. 733/1333)and al-Jazarī (d. 739/1338), the first of whom mentions a slightly later death date (the 24th of Shaʿbān / June 12), and also gives us a longer full name than al-Ṣafadī. al-Nuwayrī, *Nihāyat al-arab fī funūn al-adab,* ed. Ibrāhīm Shams al-Dīn (Beirut: Dār al-kutub al-ʿilmiyya, 2004), vol. 33:239. Al-Jazarī, *Ḥawādith al-zamān fī anbāʾi-hi wa-wafayāt al-akābir wa-l-aʿyān min abnāʾi-hi*, ed. ʿUmar ʿAbd al-Salām Tadmurī (Sidon-Beirut: al-Maktaba al-ʿaṣriyya, s.d.), vol. 2:428. Another semi-contemporary biographer, al-Fayyūmī (d. after 770 / 1368), provides the death date as the 14th of Shāʿbān, *Nathr al-jumān fī tarājim al-aʿyān,* MS Chester Beatty Ar. 4113, 258v. I am grateful to Tarek Sabraa for providing me with this last reference.

epigrams as well as a list of the books the man had written throughout his long life. Not only did he write many books, he also collected them: al-Ṣafadī tells us on the authority of a mutually acquainted bookseller that the deceased left behind no less than eighteen chests or book cases (*khazāʾin*)[3] filled with "literary gems" (*nafāʾis adabiyya*).[4] Clearly, this old man had been a bookish person. Yet al-Ṣafadī also tells us that the old man had been blinded by an arrow during the Battle of Homs against the Mongols in the year 680 / 1281, when he was only twenty nine years old.[5] Apparently, this blindness — we are never told whether it was complete or only partial — did not impede his appetite for books, for our biographer goes on to note that the blind man was able to identify in detail all of his books when handed the manuscript, even carefully recalling the time he bought them, and the exact price he paid. His wife knew the value of all these books as well and was able to secure a pension of sorts by selling them off one by one before leaving Cairo seven years after her husband's death.

I started with this peculiar biographic profile because its protagonist will be central to this study: Nāṣir al-Dīn Shāfiʿ b. ʿAlī b. ʿAbbās b. Ismāʿīl b. ʿAsākir al-Kinānī al-ʿAsqalānī al-Miṣrī,[6] commonly known as Shāfiʿ b. ʿAlī. As with many of his peers, his life revolved around books and the written word, both in his official function as *kātib* (pl. *kuttāb,* often rendered as "scribe") in the *dīwān al-inshāʾ* (composition bureau, or more generally "chancery"), and in his more informal literary activities. Here too, his blindness apparently did not impede him to continue composing poetry and prose prolifically for another half century. Although al-Ṣafadī and all other biographers mention that his official career in the chancery ended after he became blind,[7] Shāfiʿ himself would have his readers believe that he continued to work as *kātib* for several decades — his last known claim to have composed an official document dates from 708 / 1309. He collected many of his writings himself in books, some of which are reported to have amounted to

[3] On the meanings of *khazīna* (pl. *khazā'in*), see: K. Hirschler, *Medieval Damascus: Plurality and Diversity in an Arabic Library* (Edinburgh: Edinburg University Press, 2016), 87. I believe in this description chests must have been meant, because of the exact number given.

[4] Ibn Taghrī-Birdī adds "and others" (wa-ghayri-hā), *al-Manhal al-ṣāfī wa-l-mustawfī baʿda l-wāfī,* ed. Muḥammad Muḥammad Amīn (Cairo: al-Hayʾa l-Miṣriyya al-ʿāmma li-l-kutub, 1990), vol. 6:198.

[5] Al-Nuwayrī describes the event of his becoming blind in more vivid detail: "He was hit by a Mongol arrow in his head, and then that which blinded him poured forth from his brain to his eyes." *Nihāyat al-arab* 33:239. The most extensive treatment of this event can be found in the *tarjama* by al-Jazarī, which includes a first-person account of the event attributed to the blind man himself. It will be translated in full below in 2.3.3. *Ḥawādith al-zamān*, 2:428-429.

[6] Al-Ṣafadī describes him as "al-ʿAsqalānī, then [*thumma*] al-Miṣrī", implying that he moved to Egypt at some point. Ibn Taghrī-Birdī uses the same construction in *al-Manhal al-ṣāfī,* vol. 6:198.

[7] Al-Nuwayrī mentions that Shāfiʿ "was forced [to resign?] following the Battle of Ḥoms." (*qad uḍirra ʿaqīb waqʿat Ḥimṣ*) *Nihāyat al-arab* 33: 239. Paulina Lewicka, one of two scholars who edited Shāfiʿ's *sīra* of Qalāwūn, *al-Faḍl al-maʾthūr,* consulted a number of ophthalmologists on this regard: they all stated that complete loss of sight while preserving all other brain functions would have been impossible. She thinks it is more likely that he was blinded in one eye and only later gradually lost his entire sight. Lewicka, *Šāfiʿ Ibn ʿAlī's Biography of the Mamluk Sultan Qalāwūn* (Warsaw: Dialog, 2000), 91.

several volumes. As far as we know only a handful of these have survived, in addition to bits of his poetry and prose copied in other works. All of his preserved monographs are interrelated genre-wise: three *sīra*'s (Arabic plural: *siyar,* commonly rendered as "biography") of sultans whom he either served directly as *kātib* or with whom he lived contemporaneously, written at least in part in the distinctive *inshāʾ* style typical of chancery communication.

Shāfiʿ was not the only one writing such texts at the end of the thirteenth and in the early fourteenth century in Cairo. In fact, three other closely related and even partly overlapping works written by his maternal uncle Muḥyī l-Dīn ʿAbd Allāh b. Rashīd al-Dīn b. ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir (d. 692 / 1293) survive in four partially preserved manuscripts.[8] He is the other great protagonist of this dissertation, and the six *sīra*'s these two authors wrote will constitute the main corpus to be analysed. Considering the close familial and professional links between these authors, this corpus is a very closely knit one and allows us to study how authors from similar backgrounds engaged with the writing of *sīra* throughout the late seventh / thirteen and early eighth / fourteenth centuries.

But this is not only a study of two authors and the *sīra*'s they wrote. This small but closely related corpus of texts will be a gateway to exploring late thirteenth- and early fourteenth-century Syro-Egyptian ("Mamluk") literary culture, especially as it was cultivated as a means of communication and negotiation of social status amongst the elite networks of that environment. Inspired by how Jo Van Steenbergen has analysed a particular panegyric from the mid-eighth / fourteenth century, I will focus on how authors "applied prevalent historiographical and literary modes of communication within a performative context of social identity, patronage and Mamluk social organisation".[9] Although other persons and authors who were active in similar contexts will be taken into account, the *sīra*'s will remain the central point of reference in this study. Instead of only looking at these works from the angle of sultans' projects of legitimisation and their (attempts at the) establishment of personal or dynastic hegemony, as the majority of scholars have done so far, I propose to consider an angle in which social processes of patronage and participation, individual authorship, intra-elite communication, and the reproduction of literary discourses on political legitimacy are taken into account. Rather than only conceiving of a mostly one-sided interaction between a sultan and a court biographer, I investigate the personal effort of writing a *sīra* and the literary prestige deriving from it as one of several possible ways to negotiate a social position in the late medieval literary field of Cairo and beyond.

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[8] In the following pages, I will use the commonly used shortened version Ibn ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir only to refer to Muḥyī l-Dīn b. ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir. When referring to his father, son, and grandson (all of whom also bore this family name) I will use fuller versions of their names to distinguish them from each other.

[9] J. Van Steenbergen, "Qalāwūnid Discourse, Elite Communication and the Mamluk Cultural Matrix: Interpreting a 14th-Century Panegyric", *Journal of Arabic Literature* 43 (2012), 6.

Shāfiʿs vigorous book collecting as reflected in the anecdote recorded by al-Ṣafadī can be interpreted as illustrating the logic of that literary culture's habitus. Scholars have often noted that medieval Arabic biographical dictionaries are not biographical in the way it is understood in modern times, and that people were described according to the societal types they were thought to represent more so than the specific character traits that made them distinctive. In the case of scholars (*ʿulamāʾ*, singular: *ʿālim*), who constituted by far the bulk of the dictionaries' subject matter, the biographical information found in these voluminous compilations often gives us little more than dates of birth and death and a list of prominent scholars from whom the described person acquired knowledge, so we are lucky to have this one anecdote presumably exemplifying Shāfiʿ's personality.[10] While this and a number of other reported anecdotes give some individuality to the description, it also serves to portray our author as representative of a highly self-conscious and self-referential literary culture, in which innovativeness, extensive knowledge of the canon and the ability to quote and associate phrasings from that canon to any given situation were all equally valued.[11] Shāfiʿ's identification of each and every book in his collection simply by handling it could be understood as a metaphor for the ideal *kātib* as *adīb* (pl. *udabāʾ,* a cultured person, a *littérateur*) of the period who could associate discrete events to immortal phrasings and idiomatic expressions from the Arabic literary canon at any given time, endlessly reworking them into new contexts. Or, as Elias Muhanna has recently stated for a semi-contemporary scholar, our authors too indulged in "highly informed, intertextual, recherché engagements with the Arabic literary heritage".[12] We may even imagine Shāfiʿ as not even needing to see the actual works for all the details to appear in his mind, for he had internalised its contents and could apply them wherever deemed appropriate. Literary culture in this period as such fueled the sense of a highly continuous tradition, from pre-Islamic poetry and the Qur'ān to prominent latter-era poets al-Mutanabbī, al-Qāḍī l-Fāḍil, and from there to contemporary poets and prose writers.[13]

When reading Shāfiʿ's and Ibn ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir's preserved works one can see two scholars diligently applying such knowledge, in ways both typical and peculiar. Insofar

[10] C.F. Robinson, *Islamic Historiography* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), xxv, 66ff; M.K. Hermansen, "Interdisciplinary Approaches to Islamic Biographical Dictionaries", *Religion*, 18 (1988), 165. None of the biographical lemmata on Ibn ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir report anecdotes of this sort and are mostly concerned with relatively extensive samplings of his writings.

[11] Wolfhart Heinrichs has highlighted the central importance of *muḥāḍara,* "or having an apposite quotation at one's fingertips" in literary idioms of pre-modern Arabic. B. Orfali, *The Anthologist's Art:* Abū Manṣūr al-Thaʿālibī *and His* Yatīmat al-dahr (Leiden: Brill, 2016)*,* 2.

[12] E. Muhanna, *The World in a Book: al-Nuwayrī and the Islamic Encyclopedic Tradition* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2017)*,* 72. He further likens *adab* in the period to "what today's proponents of liberal arts education champion: the exposure to a certain worldview, an intellectual habitus, a cultural vocabulary."

[13] See for general remarks on this period's literary culture: T. Bauer, "Adab c) and Islamic scholarship after the 'Sunnī revival'", *EI3.*

as it is possible for a modern scholar who is only able to grasp a fraction of the vast literary background which a *kātib-adīb* of late medieval Egypt would command, this study will attempt to understand sultanic *sīra*'s as one of several arenas in which that literary continuum was performed, as one highly specific form of elite communication and social negotiation by application of historiographical and literary forms and topoi. By looking at this small corpus in detail we can thus formulate some conclusions about the workings of late medieval Arabic literary culture as well as the social practices in which our authors participated.

There is a caveat in this supposition which should be addressed at the outset: none of the texts studied here were very popular among contemporary readers. With the exception of Ibn ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir's *sīra* of Baybars which was quoted quite often by later historians, none of these texts circulated widely — all of them survive in single, often only partially preserved manuscripts. Why should such relatively minor works be taken as representative of literary culture? The corpus chosen for study is in fact of special interest for two reasons: patronage and stylistics.

Patronage has long been considered of crucial importance in the production and consumption of literature in pre-modern Islamic societies, but researchers have only recently started evaluating it more thoroughly. In many older studies there is a much repeated idea that authors produced works of various kinds, especially panegyric poetry, which they dedicated to rulers or highly placed individuals in return for monetary compensation or entitlement to particular positions of status. These works could be either requested by patrons, or authors could have written them out of personal motivations and dedicated them to highly placed individuals as a gift to ensure favour. Thomas Bauer has also argued that literary culture in late medieval Egypt and Syria became increasingly communicative in socially horizontal directions, with poems and works being offered to peers instead of to persons in positions of authority, thus forming new kinds of patronage that were less directly built around hierarchical social relationships.[14] However, as Bauer shows for these horizontal communications, we often barely know how a requested or dedicated work was received and what happened to it afterwards. Indeed, we usually know very little of the exact workings of the patronage relation between an author and his patron. In those cases where the patronage backgrounds of works have been discussed before, as in the majority of this study's corpus, many modern scholars mostly repeat earlier interpretations of such relations. For the sultanic *sīra*'s this has resulted in many scholars echoing Peter Malcolm Holt's interpretation of the *sīra*'s serving a legitimising end. It will be shown below that this is somewhat problematic, as Holt's interpretation was too simplistic and informed by a

[14] Bauer, "Mamluk Literature as a Means of Communication", in *Ubi sumus? Quo vademus? Mamluk Studies – State of the Art,* ed. S. Conermann (Bonn: V&R unipress/Bonn University Press, 2013), 23-56.

number of crucial misreadings. Furthermore, in addition to those excerpts around which Holt based his arguments, several more aspects should be taken into account to adequately interpret the complex working of patronage and literary communication found in these works. Because of the complexity of the ties between our authors, the sultans with whom their biographies deal, and the audiences for whom they might have been intended — which, it will be argued, did not necessarily coincide with the sultan — these texts constitute a corpus of high interest for discussing literary patronage relations in general, as well as the courtly social practices within which much of that patronage operated. A return to the original sources, especially as they appear in manuscript form, is crucial in this, as they often contain important clues for their production, circulation, and reception.

A second reason for the special interest of this corpus concerns questions of stylistic complexity. In many ways these texts adhere to literary standards of the time, but they do so in peculiar ways, by bringing together a large variety of text genres, which showcased their abilities in all of these genres. Furthermore, because so many aspects of literary culture are reflected in these relatively short texts — among others correspondence writing, historiography and poetry writing, all of which were burgeoning fields of literature at the time — the six *sīra*'s studied here form highly interesting case studies to investigate the ways in which political, social, and literary discourses freely migrated across genre boundaries and the ways in which authors made use of a wide range of such discourses to construct their own works. In my initial evaluation of these processes it is not important whether the works were appreciated as such, as my literary evaluation pertains only to the authors' *ambitions* to produce such works. The reception of these texts will only come into focus in the third part of this dissertation, where it will be shown that the actual afterlives of these texts could differ quite substantially from their original intentions.

The fact that ties these texts together in all their literary wide-ranging-ness is their focal point of *sīra*, which as noted can be translated simply as "biography" but which had other important connotations.[15] Here, in its most basic meaning it denotes the life and times of a person, which was a tried and proven way of writing historiography in Islamicate societies, especially in one specific case: the biography of the Prophet Muḥammad which was already early on referred to as *sīra,* and could be argued to constitute a genre in itself. In the case of our texts, however, that basic framework of one sultan's life and times is used as a central node around which several related aspects

[15] In the following pages I will mostly eschew the word "biography" and its derivatives to refer to the *sīra*'s. However, for pragmatic reasons of not clogging this dissertation with Arabic terminology, I have continued to use such terms to refer to the information found in biographical dictionaries and obituaries, despite perhaps equally problematic connotations.

could be compiled, perhaps most importantly the author's own contributions to the sultan's state. As such, instead of seeing the literary style used in these works as standard vehicles to construct legitimising narratives of rulership, I will approach these texts as complex works that used various forms of historiography, panegyric poetry, correspondence writing, and a host of other genres and expressive forms to construct literary edifices that constituted significant symbolic capital. While the works will first and foremost be interpreted in their contemporary contexts and in the light of their presumed intended audiences, I will also devote attention to the diachronic literary traditions on which our authors built, to which they explicitly or — more often — implicitly referred, as well as the influence they themselves had on later traditions. It may already be said that our authors built clearly on earlier examples, especially works dealing with the life and rule of Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn (d. 589 / 1193) written by Bahā' l-Dīn b. Shaddād (d. 632 / 1234) and ʿImād al-Dīn al-Kātib al-Iṣfahānī (d. 597 / 1201), which will be shown to have a special relationship to our authors and texts. While our authors themselves do not seem to have directly influenced later works, they did carve out a peculiar niche of literary historiography, and had some lasting influence — at the very least in the straight line from Ibn ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir to Shāfiʿ.

By taking this route of interpretation, this dissertation builds on a tradition of multifocal readings of Islamic historical sources, and posits itself as a reaction against two interconnected, widespread tendencies in studies of late medieval Egypt and Syria in particular, and of Islamic historiography in general. The first is the earlier noted tendency to interpret literary discourse as (de)legitimising political constellations around a ruler or dynasty. Legitimisation was obviously an important concern of political authorities in this period, especially for sultans whose grip on power was often contested, but it was not the only concern informing the discursive soil from which these *sīra*'s sprouted, and it may be questioned in how far literary discourse really served such a wider social function. Connected to this one-sided interpretation of sources, this dissertation reacts to decontextualised readings of Islamic historiographic narratives, by which I mean that it aims to study these books as deliberately conceived macro-texts. Instead of cherrypicking anecdotes from the rich historical and other assorted materials they include, I look at the textual fabric in which these bits of information were embedded. The cherrypicking approach can be fine for certain purposes and will indeed be used in this dissertation for those parts dealing with contextualisation, but it has the risk of relying on earlier, often outdated evaluations of sources as a whole. While allowing for the fact that this evaluation is not viable for expansive, diachronically inclined research projects, this study will argue that a return to the sources as deliberately compiled wholes is imperative if we want to develop more nuanced interpretations of the material contained in them.

Similarly, I also propose to return as much as possible to the manuscripts in which these works have come down to us. The established editions of sources have often been

too much inclined to reconstruct versions of a text that are presumed to be as close as possible to the version as intended by the author, while not always carefully noting the variation found across manuscripts.[16] While many good editions contain a discussion of the manuscripts on which it is based, these are usually informed by a historical critical mentality of establishing the relation of a certain manuscript to an original or discussing its completeness.[17] Questions of materiality are usually only treated basically, and paratextual details are often not discussed at all. Especially considering the fact that most of our texts are only known in single manuscripts, it is of vital importance to study their materiality and their historical audiences, which will be a central concern in Part Three of this dissertation.

This dissertation consists of three parts, loosely inspired by a recent monograph of Jo Van Steenbergen, which consisted of a thorough contextualisation, close reading, and material study of one short text by the late fourteenth, early fifteenth century historian Taqī l-Dīn Aḥmad b. ʿAlī l-Maqrīzī (d. 845 / 1442).[18] Similarly, this dissertation will in a first part detail the various historical, political, social, and literary contexts which one needs to bear in mind while studying these texts. In a second part, a close reading will be undertaken of the six *sīra*'s that make up this dissertation's corpus in conjunction with relevant extracts from contemporary or later texts. This will be done on a thematic level, highlighting the various connections our authors established and the ways in which similar backgrounds (despite differing personal experiences) drove them to construct accounts of rulership and patronage that are often very similar. In a third part, the afterlives of the texts will be studied: starting from their immediate reception as manuscripts (presumably) offered to patrons, to the ways in which these manuscripts were read by later authors, and ultimately their fates in the various libraries where they ended up and as historical texts used by scholars to reconstruct the history of the so-called "Mamluk" sultanate's early decades.

Before moving on to this analysis, however, two further introductory sections are necessary. A first will discuss in somewhat more detail the authors and texts central to this study. Some aspects of our authors' professional lives will be dealt with in more detail in Part One (especially 2.3.3.), so I will limit myself here to general observations that may suffice as an introduction. The second section will formulate a number of

[16] K. Hirschler, "Studying Mamluk Historiography: From Source-Criticism to the Cultural Turn", in *Ubi sumus? Quo vademus? Mamluk Studies – State of the Art,* ed. S. Conermann (Bonn: V&R unipress/Bonn University Press, 2013), 164-166.

[17] While the majority of the editions in our corpus are based on one manuscript each, the one edition that makes use of two manuscripts does so with a number of somewhat questionable editorial choices, as we shall see.

[18] Jo Van Steenbergen, *Caliphate and Kingship in a Fifteenth-Century Literary History of Muslim Leadership and Pilgrimage* (Leiden: Brill, 2016).

theoretical reflections that will form the basis which will be expanded upon throughout the dissertation.

Authors and texts

Muḥyī l-Dīn ʿAbdallāh b. ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir was born on the 9th of Muḥarram 620 / 12th of February 1223 and died on the 3rd of Rajab 692 / 9th of June 1293.[19] There is some evidence of him being active in literary circles in the 640s / 1240s, but he appears to have entered the chancery only sometime in the late 650s / 1250s. He is mostly known as one of the most prominent *kuttāb* under al-Ẓāhir Baybars (r. 658/1260 - 676/1277), at some point even becoming *ṣāḥib dīwān al-inshāʾ*, leader of the composition bureau – more on these terms in Chapter 2. We know that he continued writing in the chancery during the reigns of Qalāwūn (r. 678/1279 - 689/1290) and al-Ashraf Khalīl (r. 689/1290 - 693/1293), but he seems to have relinquished his leading position as *ṣāḥib* for what may have amounted to a sort of honourary position, possibly due to faltering eyesight. His son Fatḥ al-Dīn b. ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir is said to have lead the chancery under Qalāwūn and gained especially in prominence under his successor al-Ashraf Khalīl. We do in any case have several official documents drawn up by Ibn ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir dating from these later reigns. Three of his *sīra*'s have partially survived, as well as a *dīwān* of his poetry (in three copies, none contemporary), a fragment of his geographical work on Cairo (which was used extensively by later authors al-Qalqashandī and al-Maqrīzī), several copies of a particularly eloquent *risāla* (epistle), and several copies of a short collection of al-Qāḍī l-Fāḍil's epistolography.[20] Ibn ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir was considered one of the leading literary figures of his time by several of his contemporaries, and as a result much of his writing was extensively quoted by later authors. It is thus possible to evaluate a good deal of his epistolary writing and poetry by looking at these fragments in addition to the works he self-compiled. I will do so at times when I consider these fragments relevant to information contained within his *sīra*'s.

Ibn ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir's nephew Shāfiʿ b. ʿAlī was born in the year 649 / 1252, but his biographers disagree on the exact date, as noted above. They also suggest that he spent

[19] Information compiled from various incomplete dates given by: al-Ṣafadī, *al-Wāfī bi-l-wafāyāt,* eds. Aḥmad al-Arnāwūṭ & Turkī Muṣṭafā (Beirut: Dār iḥyāʾ al-turāth al-ʿarabī 2000), vol. 17:135; al-Jazarī, *Ḥawādith al-zamān,* 1:175; Ibn Taghrī-Birdī, *al-Manhal al-ṣāfī,* 7:98-99; al-Maqrīzī, *al-Muqaffā l-kabīr*, ed. Muḥammad al-Yaʿlāwī (Beirut: Dār al-gharb al-islāmī, 1991), 4:580.
[20] See for references, Bauden, "Ibn ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir", *EI3.*

the earlier part of his life in Ashkelon but that he moved to Egypt at an unspecified later date. This move must have taken place before or at the latest in 1270, when Baybars destroyed Ashkelon. Shāfiʿ first appears on the scene as *kātib* at the very end of Baybars' reign and especially during the sultanate of his son and successor al-Saʿīd Bereke. He remained active in the chancery under Qalāwūn, during which he may have achieved a rather high position. It is during the latter's sultanate that he was blinded by an arrow in the Battle of Homs; as noted from that point onwards his life story becomes problematic. Whereas all of his biographers tell us that he was put on some sort of pension and sent home, he includes several documents and accounts in his *sīra*'s which imply that he was still working in the chancery at later moments, especially during the later years of Qalāwūn's sultanate. We do in any case know that he retained his salary afterwards, and perhaps he held some kind of consultative function to his family members in the institution. It is in any case certain that he continued to live for quite a long time, and that he wrote several books and a great deal of poetry. As far as I am aware, only three of these books have survived, two more or less in full and one only partially. Unlike Ibn ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir, Shāfiʿ's fame as a littérateur seems to have diminished dramatically after his death. Later biographers do mention him but mostly reproduce information found in the works of contemporary authors and focus nearly exclusively on his poetical writing.

A number of other authors will figure prominently throughout this dissertation, but their texts are not explicitly included in the main corpus. We have for example already come across al-Ṣafadī, whose two massive biographical dictionaries furnish a wealth of information about a great number of notable persons who lived in the first century of Mamluk rule (including both our authors), which will be used as important sources to form an understanding of the social environments in which our authors were active. Most other such authors will be introduced when they appear, but one especially prominently used text needs to be signposted here: the biography (*tārīkh*) of Baybars written by ʿIzz al-Dīn b. Shaddād (d. 684 / 1285). This text is regularly named as part of the corpus of sultanic *sīra*'s,[21] but I have not included it fully because of its stylistic inclinations and textual construction, both of which are in general quite different from those of our authors (for one, it includes far less *sajʿ*). While I have not analysed the text extensively, I have made ample use of it as a contemporary reference for the reign of Baybars, written by an author with a comparable background to our authors but with a

[21] ʿIzz al-Dīn b. Shaddād, *Tārīkh al-Malik al-Ẓāhir,* ed. Aḥmad Ḥuṭayṭ (Wiesbaden: Franz Steiner, 1983). See for an example of its evaluation as part of the corpus, A. Troadec, "Les Mamelouks dans l'espace syrien: stratégies de domination et résistances (658/1260-741/1341)" (Unpublished PhD thesis, Ecole Pratique des hautes-études, 2014), 71. For a discussion of the text's contents, see: Y. Koch, "'Izz al-Dīn ibn Shaddād and his Biography of Baybars", *Annali (Istituto Universitario Orientale),* 43/2 (1983), 249-287.

different historiographical approach. Where his text is effectively comparable to aspects found in the main corpus, I will make reference to it and include it in the analysis.

Six *sīra*'s written by Ibn ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir and Shāfiʿ b. ʿAlī have been preserved. The table on the following page gives an overview of these texts which may be used as a reference. The overview includes their (presumed) titles, the manuscripts in which they survive, the editions that have been made of these texts, as well as the chronological range of their contents. I will give much more information about the manuscripts in Part Three, and the chronological range will be discussed in more detail in Part Two. Al-Ṣafadī informs us that Shāfiʿ wrote at least one more *sīra* about al-Ashraf Khalīl but I am not aware of any copies of it surviving. More specific information about the texts will generally be given where appropriate, but two texts need to be dealt with in slightly more detail here, as the authenticity of the first has been challenged recently and the second is a new discovery.

Authors	Ibn ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir			Shāfiʿ b. ʿAlī		
Title (in square brackets when not explicitly mentioned in MS)	[*al-Rawḍ al-zāhir fī sīrat al-Malik al-Ẓāhir*]	*Tashrīf al-ayyām wa-l-ʿuṣūr bi-sīrat al-Malik al-Manṣūr*	*al-Alṭāf al-khafiyya min al-sīra al-sharīfa al-sulṭāniyya al-Malikiyya al-Ashrafiyya*	*al-Faḍl al-maʾthūr min sīrat al-Malik al-Manṣūr*	*Ḥusn al-manāqib al-sirriyya al-muntazaʿa min al-sīra al-Ẓāhiriyya* (abridgement of *al-Rawḍ al-zāhir*)	[*Sīrat al-Malik al-Nāṣir Muḥammad*]
MSS	BL Or. Add 23331; Süleymaniye Fatih 4366	BnF Arabe 1704	Bayerische Staatsbibliothek Cod. arab 405.	Bodleian Marsh 424	BnF Arabe 1707	BnF Arabe 1705
Manuscript date	Both manuscripts undated	Undated	Undated	Undated	2 Jumādā I 716 / July 23, 1316	Undated
Extent to which preserved	Both MSS defective, but likely add up to the majority of the original text (though see discussion below)	Only the second and third of three original volumes (third is missing its opening pages)	Only the third of originally at least four volumes	More or less intact manuscript	More or less intact manuscript	Only a fragment of 107 folios, original work probably several volumes
Edition(s)	Syedah Fatima Sadequi, 1958 (partial); ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz al-Khuwayṭir, 1976	Murad Kāmil, 1961	Axel Moberg, 1902; new edition by Tarek Sabraa is being prepared	ʿUmar Tadmurī, 1999; Paulina Lewicka, 2000	ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz al-Khuwayṭir, 1976 (reprinted 1989)	Being prepared by Frédéric Bauden and myself
Sultan	Baybars (r. 1260-1277)	Qalāwūn (r. 1279-1290)	al-Ashraf Khalīl (r. 1290-1293)	Qalāwūn (r. 1279-1290)	Baybars (r. 1260-1277)	al-Nāṣir Muḥammad (r. 1293-1294, 1299-1309, 1310-1341)
Chronological scope of preserved text	647 / 1249 – 676 / 1277	680 / 1281 -689 / 1290	690 / 1291 - 691 / 1292	647 / 1249 - 689 / 1290	647 / 1249 - 689-1290	703 /1303 - 709 / 1309 (skips events between 705-708)

Table 1: Main corpus overview

The oldest, most widely read, and most often quoted text in this corpus is the one that is conventionally referred to as *al-Rawḍ al-zāhir fī sīrat al-Malik al-Ẓāhir* ("The radiant garden in the *sīra* of al-Malik al-Ẓāhir [Baybars]"). At the same time, it is perhaps the most problematic text in the corpus. Although two manuscripts have survived of the *sīra* of Baybars, both are only partial copies and neither has conserved its title page or colophon. Two editions have been prepared on the basis of these manuscripts: a first by Syedah Fatima Sadequi based only on the British Library manuscript, and a second by ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz al-Khuwayṭir based on a collation of both manuscripts.[22] The latter also made a translation of the text which is available in his unpublished PhD dissertation.[23] Al-Khuwayṭir's edition is not an extremely critical edition as it notes variation between the two manuscripts only in a very general way: for the overlapping parts of the manuscripts (the 65 first folio's in the Istanbul manuscript) he generally followed the Istanbul manuscript except when there were clearly pages missing (this occurs a few times throughout the manuscript), where he followed the British Library manuscript.[24] While the word variation is admittedly limited, some parts are more problematic: for example, a section in which the British Library manuscript is missing a number of paragraphs (highlighted by the copyist) is not explicitly noted and al-Khuwayṭir simply follows the Istanbul manuscript.[25] Near the end of the book al-Khuwayṭir has fixed one of these lacunae by quoting a letter also written by Ibn ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir, which was probably an earlier version of the same text, quoted by the much later author al-Qalqashandī.[26] The editor notes that he filled in the gap by doing so, but neglects to highlight that from the point where the Istanbul manuscript picks up there is actually a significant degree of variation between the two texts. I will return to this specific section in more detail in 6.2.1.2.

While the editors and most scholars have taken these manuscripts to constitute the authentic primary text written by Ibn ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir, several scholars have raised doubts about its authenticity. Ulrich Haarmann for example suggested that the surviving manuscripts must constitute a draft or at least non-final version ("nicht der Schlußfassung") of the final text, as parts of it are quoted by later authors but have no

[22] Syedah Fatima Sadequi (ed.), *Baybars I of Egypt* (London: Oxford University Press, 1958); Ibn ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir, *al-Rawḍ al-zāhir fī sīrat al-Malik al-Ẓāhir,* ed. ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz al-Khuwayṭir (Riyadh: n.p., 1976).

[23] Abdul Aziz al-Khowayter, "A Critical Edition of an Unknown Source for the Life of al-Malik al-Ẓāhir Baibars, with introduction, translation, and notes." (Unpublished PhD thesis, School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London, 1960) volume two (referred to below as Khuwaytir, *Translation*). Volume one and three constitute respectively a study of Baybars' life and politics, and a preliminary edition of the Arabic text. The study was later published as Abdul-Aziz Khowaiter, *Baibars the First: His Endeavours and Achievements* (London: Green Mountain Press, 1978).

[24] For the overlapping part with British Library, MS O/C Add. 23331, Istanbul Süleymaniye, MS Fatih 4366 has gaps between folios 16v-17r and 34v-35r.

[25] British Library, MS O/C Add. 23331, 71r-72v; Istanbul Süleymaniye, MS Fatih 4366, 40r-41v; *Rawḍ,* 181-183.

[26] Elsewhere he sometimes quotes from Shāfiʿ b. ʿAlī's abridgement of his uncle's *sīra*.

equivalent in the original *sīra*.[27] More recently, two Arab scholars, Ṣafwān Ṭaha Ḥasan al-Nāṣir and Tarek Sabraa, have reiterated such doubts. As the latter has as of yet only informed me orally of his research, I will here mostly deal with al-Nāṣir's remarks, which are basically summarised by this (translated) paragraph from his article on the subject:

> After precise scrutiny of the body of the book "al-Rawḍ al-zāhir..." it became clear to us from the totality of internal proofs included in the text as well as external [proofs] such as texts found in other books, that the book was indeed originally [written] by Ibn ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir but that in its present state it seems to be a summary of the original book, and that the one who executed this summary was not Muḥyī al-Dīn b. ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir [himself] but someone else. Also, the authenticity of the title which the two editors ([Syedah Fatima] Sadequi and [ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz] al-Khuwayṭir) established is completely unfounded, having no connection to the *sīra* studied here.[28]

These are major claims and al-Nāṣir next spends several pages laying out his arguments. He starts out by noting that at some points when the author of the text refers to himself, he does so by writing "*qāla mukhtaṣir al-sīra*" ("the one who abridged the *sīra* says") and at one point even as "*qāla Ibn al-Qaysarānī, mukhtaṣir al-sīra",* perhaps referring to the identity of the abridger.[29] While al-Khuwayṭir maintained that these comments were originally marginal comments that were added into the body of the text by the copyist of the Istanbul manuscript (or an earlier manuscript from which it is descended),[30] al-Nāṣir disregards this and suggests that Ibn ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir may have asked Ibn al-Qaysarānī to abridge the text, as he is said to have done with his nephew Shāfiʿ b. ʿAlī. Furthermore, there is a note in the text asking for God's forgiveness for a person who died a few years after Ibn ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir, and al-Nāṣir claims that statements in which the author refers to himself as "*muʾallif*" or "*kātib*" of this *sīra,* which appear more than forty times in the text, are highly unusual for the period, and that such statements do not appear in the two other established works by Ibn ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir.[31]

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[27] U. Haarmann, *Quellenstudien zur frühen Mamlukenzeit* (Freiburg: Klaus Schwartz, 1970), 100.
[28] Ṣafwān Ṭaha Ḥasan al-Nāṣir, "'Sīrat al-Malik al-Ẓāhir Baybars' li-Muḥyī al-Dīn b. ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir (t. 692 / 1293): Dirāsa naqdiyya fī taḥqīq al-kitāb", *Majallat al-tarbiya wa-l-ʿilm,* 17/3 (2010), 84.
[29] A certain Fatḥ al-Dīn ʿAbd Allāh b. al-Qaysarānī al-Ḥalabī is listed by ʿIzz al-Dīn b. Shaddād as having worked in the chancery under al-Ẓāhir Baybars. *Tārīkh al-Malik al-Ẓāhir,* 238. Al-Ṣafadī provides some further information, telling us amongst other things that he became *wazīr* under al-Saʿīd Bereke, Baybars' son, but notes no explicit link to Ibn ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir. *al-Wāfī bi-l-wafāyāt,* 17:317.
[30] The instances where these mentions appear in the Istanbul manuscript appear as part of the body text and not as marginal comments.
[31] al-Nāṣir, "'Sīrat al-Malik al-Ẓāhir Baybars'", 84-86. Al-Nāṣir lists all these instances in a table on pp. 90-92.

Moving on to the appraisal of the work by contemporary and later authors, he notes that Shāfiʿ b. ʿAlī's own abridged text contains numerous additions not found in the original text, even excluding those in which Shāfiʿ explicitly acknowledges having added information. Similarly, as Haarmann already noted, al-Maqrīzī and other authors claim to have taken information from the book which is not present in the preserved manuscripts.[32] Lastly, al-Nāṣir observes that slightly later authors such as al-Yūnīnī and al-Kutubī who referred to the book did so by another title: *al-Faḍl al-bāhir fī sīrat (aw akhbār) al-sulṭān al-Malik al-Ẓāhir* ("The brilliant favour in the *sīra* (or: in the reports) of the sultan al-Malik al-Ẓāhir"). According to him, the standard title used in the editions is in fact the original title of ʿIzz al-Dīn b. Shaddād's work which is referred to by a number of semi-contemporary historians as *al-Rawḍ al-zāhir fī sīrat al-Malik al-Ẓāhir*. Al-Nāṣir then suggests that the fragmentary nature of this evidence may be rooted in Shāfiʿ's claim that Ibn ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir's presented parts of it to the sultan and that these parts may then have been compiled or started to lead their own lives after their original composition.[33]

What to make of all this evidence? It should be noted that many of these arguments were noted by al-Khuwayṭir himself. However, the latter chose to disregard these observations because of the text's overall cohesive appearance and scholars have since accepted the currently edited text as Ibn ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir's original text.[34] Tarek Sabraa has expounded similar arguments concerning the text's authenticity — although he was unaware of al-Nāṣir's article — arguing that there are two possibilities: either the text is, as al-Nāṣir claims, a *mukhtaṣar* written by the mentioned Ibn al-Qaysarānī or by al-Nuwayrī (apparently based on stylistic considerations), or the text as we have it is one of at least two recensions of the *sīra* which circulated amongst later scholars, a relatively common practice among authors of the period, especially with literary works.[35]

While the evidence given cannot easily be gainsaid, it must be said that al-Nāṣir's evaluations are marked by rather traditional views of authorship and manuscript culture.[36] Haarmann's and Sabraa's remarks are more plausible, but remain ultimately problematic because they are based entirely on hypothesis. The *sīra* of Baybars does indeed differ slightly from the two other known works of Ibn ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir, both of which seem to have been more extensive works originally and contain more passages written in *sajʿ*. However, neither of the other two texts are as fully preserved as the *sīra* of Baybars, so making such an evaluation is difficult. Furthermore, the two manuscripts of these later texts are high-profile presentation copies, while both the British Library

[32] Idem, 86-88.
[33] Idem, 88-89.
[34] *Rawḍ*, 17-21.
[35] Personal communication. For an example of several versions of the same text circulating, see Thomas Bauer's discussion of a text by Ibn Nubāta in "Mamluk Literature as a Means of Communication", 27-29.
[36] Al-Nāṣir did not consult either of the two manuscripts in his study.

and Istanbul manuscripts of the *sīra* of Baybars are relatively common types without much embellishment.[37] It is as such indeed possible that the two manuscripts we have derive from a later version of a presumed original offered to the sultan's treasury, or that they derive from an abridgement or variation of Ibn ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir's original text composed by a later author. The fact that Shāfiʿ definitely did write a summary may even resonate in interesting, but completely hypothetical ways. Similar to some apparently unsolicited letters he included in his texts on Qalāwūn and al-Nāṣir Muḥammad, he may actually have composed his summary of Ibn ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir's text not upon his uncle's request as he claims, but as a competitive gesture, a performance of his own rhetorical fitness towards the one who did abridge the original *sīra*. I will return to this hypothesis in Part Three.

Two arguments may be formulated in favour of the text being at least very closely related to the original work. First is the fact that its introduction, which is preserved in the British Library Manuscript, makes no reference whatsoever to it being a *mukhtaṣar* or a later recension. Instead we get a rhetorically dense introduction in which the author posits himself very clearly in close relation to the sultan as a validation of its historiographical value. In Shāfiʿ's explicit abridgement of this text on the other hand, Ibn ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir's introduction is excised and replaced by an entirely new one which takes the project of rewriting the *sīra* as its core task. I will deal with both these introductions in much more detail below (4.2.), but I will consider both to be authentic there. A second argument is related to al-Khuwayṭir's argument of cohesiveness: unlike Shāfiʿ's *Ḥusn al-manāqib* which often somewhat confusingly races through the historical narrative only to pause at certain events which are recounted in more detail, neither of the two manuscripts gives the impression of having schematised information from an original source. As such, I will deal with the text as found in al-Khuwayṭir's edition and in the two extant manuscripts as the closest possible iterations of Ibn ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir's *sīra* of Baybars.

Lastly, concerning the questions raised about the text's title, I am not entirely convinced by the arguments raised by al-Nāṣir and believe that the use of the alternative title *al-Faḍl al-bāhir* would be just as tenuous as the more established title, considering the fact that neither of the manuscripts refer to either of these titles. The attribution of the title *al-Rawḍ al-zāhir* to ʿIzz al-Dīn b. Shaddād's text by the slightly later historians al-Yūnīnī and Ibn al-Dawādārī, which has been raised as an argument in favour of a confounded title transmission, is also problematic considering the fact that this latter text's single surviving manuscript does not carry this title on its elaborately executed title page. Of course, transmission of titles amongst historians of the period

[37] However, both are missing their title pages. Both manuscripts are neatly written but not widely spaced.

was often ambiguous and historians only rarely named the works they used in full.[38] The argument that the title may also be based on a mistake by Ḥajjī Khalīfa who misnamed the text based on the identical title used by al-ʿAynī in his panegyric on the much later sultan al-Ẓāhir Ṭaṭar, can easily be gainsaid by referral to several other title reuses throughout the period and the fact that Khalīfa's titles are regularly mistaken.[39] While I can again not entirely gainsay these arguments, I will in the following consider the transmitted titles for Ibn ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir's and ʿIzz al-Dīn b. Shaddād's texts to be, if not exactly certain, at least highly probable. In the case of Ibn ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir's *sīra* of Baybars, I will only refer to the alternative title when actually discussing its possible meanings.

The second text which should be discussed in slightly more detail than is given in the table above is Shāfiʿ's *sīra* of al-Nāṣir Muḥammad, which was presumed lost. I have however discovered that the partially preserved annalistic biography of al-Nāṣir Muḥammad in the Bibliothèque Nationale manuscript "Arabe 1705" is actually part of Shāfiʿ b. ʿAlī's *sīra* of that sultan. Such a text is mentioned simply as *Sīrat al-Malik al-Nāṣir* by al-Ṣafadī. He also mentions a second text with a more elaborate title which apparently deals with the same subject matter: *Naẓm al-jawāhir fī sīrat al-Malik al-Nāṣir*. The word "*naẓm*" ("versification, (poetry) composition") could however mean that this work was a text in verse, which the text found in Arabe 1705 definitely is not – although it *is* written in large part in *sajʿ* – so the first option seems more likely, especially since al-Ṣafadī stresses that this particular text was written *naẓman* ("in verse").[40] The smoking gun by which the author could be identified is the inclusion of an epigram about the well-known contemporary scholar Ibn Taymiyya, mentioned as being written "by the compiler of this *sīra*" (*jāmiʿ hādhihi l-sīra*), that was also included by al-Ṣafadī as the concluding poem in his biographical lemma of Shāfiʿ b. ʿAlī, and later copied by a number of other biographers. The text is also clearly related to Shāfiʿ's other writings on a stylistic level, due to its distinctive use of *sajʿ*. I will highlight some elements that are typical to this author's style below when quoting him. As the text has not been published, I will always refer to the manuscript foliation. A joint edition by myself and professor Frédéric Bauden is currently being prepared.

[38] See also P.M. Holt, "Review of: Die Geschichte des Sultans Baibars von 'Izz ad-dīn Muḥammed b. 'Alī b. Ibrāhīm b. Šaddād (st. 684/1285)" *BSOAS,* 49/1 (1986), 219.
[39] This claim has been made in a personal communication by Tarek Sabraa.
[40] A counterargument may be formulated on the basis of Shāfiʿ's referral to Ibn ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir's writing of his *sīra* of Baybars as "*qad iftataḥa ayyāma-hu bi-**naẓm** sīra ratala fī-hā suwar maḥāsini-hi*" ("he captured his days with the *composition* of a *sīra* in which he eloquently constructed chapters on his virtues"). *Ḥusn al-manāqib,* 56.

Theoretical framework: Literary Performance of Social Status

As this study is fundamentally concerned with understanding the genesis of texts and their social functions, aspects about which the texts themselves often times do not explicitly tell us much, it is important to explicitate the central tents of the theoretical framework which will be informing my understanding. While I have taken much inspiration from several theories, I will be following none of them exclusively, instead using a variety of related insights to make sense of the various idiosyncracies of the texts under study.

My approach will be three-sided: a first is related to a growing field of comparative literary theory in which non-Western literatures are increasingly understood "from within" and "on [their] own terms". In the case of Arabic, this means reverting more fundamentally to the analytical hermeneutics developed by Arabic scholars themselves, several of whom lived contemporarily to our authors.[41] As Rebecca Gould has argued, choosing to read Arabic texts in this way means abandoning a number of major hermeneutical concepts of Western literary criticism, perhaps most importantly that of *mimesis.* Unlike Western thinkers, Arabic theoreticians did not really pick up on Aristotle's mimetic theories but instead mostly developed his views on poetics as serving either praise or blame.[42] While I am sympathetic to this approach, as will become clear from the fact that I will try to understand our author's intentions in large part based on the ways in which they themselves formulated them, another part of my analysis is still fundamentally preoccupied with mimesis due to the historiographical focus of the texts in my corpus. This focus means that our authors were of course in large part concerned with rendering (or, more correctly, interpreting) time and events as they appeared. Gould argues from a position in which poetry is the central concern of classical Arabic literary criticism, but the texts studied here, while containing many excerpts of poetry, are in large part prose texts with some form of historical information taking central position.

As such, I will also be using the works of two Western thinkers to interpret the material. The most prominently visible of these is the French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu, whose concepts I will make use of to evaluate the social processes behind literary production and consumption, and which I have already referred to a number of

[41] R. Gould, "Telling The Story of Literature from Inside Out: Methods and Tools for Non-European Poetics", *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East,* 38/1 (2018), 170-180. See also the general discussion in A. Talib, *How Do You Say 'Epigram' in Arabic? Literary History at the Limits of Comparison* (Leiden: Brill, 2017).
[42] Gould, "The Much-Maligned Panegyric: Toward a Political Poetics of Premodern Literary Form", *Comparative Literature Studies*, 52/2 (2015), 256. See also K. Mallette, "Beyond Mimesis: Aristotle's *Poetics* in the Medieval Mediterranean", *PMLA* 124/2 (2009), 583-591.

times above (i.e. "habitus", "field", "social practice"). Yet, the social determinism that is often noted by critics of Pierre Bourdieu,[43] will here be tempered by drawing his theory into dialogue with the narrative and ontological theories of the French hermeneutic Paul Ricoeur, whose somewhat less widely known theories I will turn to first.

I will think with Ricoeur to tackle the mimetic process of composing a historiographical work in which truth claims about the value of the author's personal witnessing of and participating in many of the events under discussion figured dominantly. How did authors narrate the life of a sultan? What choices did they make to construct their texts? How was historical reality reflected in writing? In his grand study *Temps et récit* Ricoeur proposed an interpretation of narrative and time as a mediation between his interpretations of Augustine's aporetic meditations on time and Aristotle's classic mimetic theory, a process of what he called "mise en intrigue", conventionally rendered in English as "emplotment". The mimetic process often receives the most attention in discussions of Ricoeur's theory, but the interplay between time and narrative is in fact the most central of his concerns, as he posits that people experience time and reality narratively. At one point he summarises his basic theory as follows:

> Il existe entre l'activité de raconter une histoire et le caractère temporel de l'expérience humaine une corrélation qui n'est pas purement accidentelle, mais présente une forme de nécessité transculturelle. [...] *Le temps devient temps humain dans la mesure où il est articulé sur un mode narratif, et que le récit atteint sa signification plénière quand il devient une condition de l'existence temporelle.*[44]

Ricoeur envisions that relation between narrative and time as a three-stage process, which he refers to simply as "mimesis I", "mimesis II", and "mimesis III". Basically, this process delineates three stages of a narrative process: mimesis I constitutes the cognitive level of lived experience based on "pré-compréhension du monde de l'action" on a structural, symbolic and temporal level.[45] It refers to our implicit understanding of the world and the position of actions and time in that world, "ce qu'il en est de l'agir

[43] For a relatively early example of such criticism, see: R. Jenkins, "Pierre Bourdieu and the Reproduction of Determinism", *Sociology* 16/2 (1982), 270-281. However, see also: Y. Yang, "Bourdieu, Practice, and Change: Beyond the Criticism of Determinism", *Educational Philosophy and Theory* 46/14 (2014), 1522-1540.

[44] P. Ricoeur, *Temps et récit 1: L'intrigue et le récit historique* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1983), 105. Italics from the original. Roger Chartier aptly summarises Ricoeur's narrative theory as a "philosophical endeavor that [...] consider[s] how the narrative configurations that form stories (of fiction or history) remodel the private consciousness and the temporal experience of subjects." R. Chartier, "Texts, Printing, Readings", in *The New Cultural History,* ed. L. Hunt (Oakland: University of California Press, 1989), 157.

[45] Ricoeur, *Temps et récit 1,* 108-109.

humain".[46] To move from that first interpretative act, Ricoeur distinguishes a mimesis II, "l'opération de configuration" from that first empirical experience to writing it down through received structures. It is a mediatory act between what has been witnessed and what is written down or recounted, the comprehension of the chaos of lived experience into a neatly structured, "congruent" whole involving causes, results, conclusions, etc.[47] Mimesis II is clearly the crux of the process, but it does not end there, for in mimesis III "l'intersection du monde du texte et du monde de l'auditeur ou du lecteur" takes place, that is the way in which a text communicates to and is comprehended by its readers or listeners. This last process can be compared to the reception aesthetics developed by among others Wolfgang Iser and Hans Robert Jauss, whose work Ricoeur refers to repeatedly, but which he thus embeds within a more encompassing narrative theory.[48] The three stages of mimesis may be roughly equated with the three major parts of this dissertation: "mimesis I" deals very broadly with the contexts which informed the ways in which our authors "comprehended" the world they lived in (Part 1), "mimesis II" with the actual textual forms, the "emplotments" used by our authors to render their experience into coherent texts (Part 2), and "mimesis III" with the ways in which later audiences engaged with the texts (Part 3).

In Ricoeur's view, narration is at the same time an interpretative and a creative process. Interpretative, because time is an enigma which we can only make sense of by narrating it, in which we are heavily influenced by established narrative paradigms.[49] It is however also creative, because, although Ricoeur notes the correlation between time experienced and the written account of time, this is not a straightforward process, and in a sense writing history or fiction is an act of creating time – a circular reasoning which Ricoeur acknowledges, but claims not to be a vicious circle but rather "a healthy circle, whose two halves mutually reinforce one another".[50] Given that our authors presumably set out with specific ideas of how they wanted to represent a sultan, their selection of historical data to construct their narration of the sultan is, like any historical writing, an interpretative but also a creative act. By making a selection of many possible images to portray a sultan, they can be said to *create* that image. Indeed, our authors even claim their image to be the best of possible images because of the author's intimate knowledge of the happenings. Hence, the best possible sultan is also

[46] Ibidem, 125.
[47] Ibidem, 130.
[48] Ibidem, 136.
[49] Ibidem, 24. ""La spéculation sur le temps est une rumination inconclusive à laquelle seule réplique l'activité narrative." For Ricoeur, this idea bridges the gap created by Augustine by bringing it into dialogue with Aristotle's mimetic theory.
[50] "Un cercle bien portant, dont les deux moitiés se renforcent mutuellement". Ibidem, 17. Translated in: Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative volume 1,* tr. Kathleen McLaughlin & David Pellauer (Chicago-London: University of Chicago Press, 1985), 3.

the one portrayed by our authors, which resonates strongly with the concepts of historiographical necessity expressed in their introductions (see 4.2.). In my analysis in Part Two I will return regularly to Ricoeur's theories to elucidate and theorise the narrative practices found in the texts.

It is my contention in this dissertation that authors did not simply make use of narrative and stylistic techniques for the sake of literature but were active in a social competitive field in which they used literary formats and formulas as forms of cultural capital, and as performance of a particular literary identity. This brings me to the second part of my theoretical framework in which I will tackle a number of questions related to the simple question "why"? Why were certain authorial choices made and not others? More fundamentally, why did one set about writing a *sīra* in the first place? Evaluating these works as working within a logic of social practice helps to elucidate these questions.

Pierre Bourdieu developed an expansive theory within which all forms of social practice could be analysed, both historical and contemporary. His view of society is fiercely competitive, and sees social actions as efforts to negotiate social positions in specific "fields" by ways of acquiring and employing different forms of "capital". Considering the stress on practice, the field should be understood as a field of interactions, an invisible space in which agents take up social positions vis-à-vis each other by what Bourdieu calls position takings. These are interactions not only between persons, but also with certain types of "capital" (economic, symbolic and cultural), that may be acquired through all sorts of ways (inheritance, work, education, etc.). Agents employ their access to and mastery of specific forms of capital in competitive practices to gain prevalence in one or more overlapping "fields", that is the arenas within which social action take place. Bourdieu has in fact devoted some time to the stakes of the "literary field", though he did so mostly from the perspective of bourgeois literary culture in nineteenth century France. He developed these ideas both in the specific article "Le champ littéraire" and in his major study of cultural practice *La Distinction.*[51] In the former, he argues that literary works cannot be read as windows onto a social group without taking into account the intermediary role of the field as facilitator of social action, especially as it relates to larger fields of power. That is to say, any literary work should be read within the context of the field in which its author is deploying his work as a form of capital, and it is thus necessary to understand the inherently relational quality of texts, both in relation to other texts produced by other (contemporary or preceding) agents within the field and in relation to other forms of social practice. Literary works can as such be seen as personal engagements with forms of capital and

[51] P. Bourdieu, "Le champ littéraire", *Actes de la recherche en sciences sociales* 89 (1991), 3-46; Bourdieu, *La distinction: Critique sociale du jugement* (Paris: Les Editions de Minuit, 1979).

the "habitus" – the ways in which social interactions are governed by usual practice, often quite unconsciously – reigning in the field, and ultimately converge into individual position takings in that field.[52] These position takings should then again be understood in the context of power relations, for agents do not only negotiate their positions to gain literary fame, they also aspire to some kind of powerful position, in which they gain influence over the field itself. Furthermore, the literary field always exists in relation to fields of political and economic power, and agents will use their position within the literary field to improve their relationships of patronage with powerful agents in the other fields. Due to the specific nature of the sources studied, I will only make claims about literature and society in this period at large insofar as the specific iterations of such a relation between literature and society found in or exemplified by these texts illustrate these processes.

The strength of Bourdieu's model is that it provides a number of tools that can be identified in a given context, facilitating an analysis of the specific relationship of disparate elements found in the historical sources – the field, the forms of capital, the habitus. It is however of paramount importance that one meticulously identifies the specific elements. Above I have done this only in the most rudimentary fashion as a preliminary exploration of the theoretical possibilities. My identifications of the relevant forms of capital, of the field, the habitus etc. will be fine-tuned and elaborated further on in the study.

To return to my first point, however, it should be noted that the literary forms and fields studied by Ricoeur and especially by Bourdieu are thoroughly modern, which is risky in terms of anachronistic evaluation. While Ricoeur's analystic framework was developed on the basis of (radical, and as such quite "modern") readings of St. Augustine and Aristotle, Bourdieu mostly evaluated capitalist and industrial forms of society. Bourdieu's description of the literary field is one in which eternal change took place, and in which younger generations denounced the works, style, and methods of older generations, calling for "innovation" in manifestos or in their works. However, this is a highly modern conceptualisation of literature, and in this guise it is not relevant for medieval contexts, where radical innovation was often even seen as a problematic phenomenon. Ruptures were much more subtle, and would always actively reconnect to the works of earlier generations, which results in works that to modern eyes often come across as stylistically static and repetitive. That does not have to mean, however, that the field itself was static, because it was exactly this endless reworking of the tradition without radically renewing that rendered its vitality, at least for contemporary readers. Denouncing such practices as scholastic or even pedantic linguistic games, as much

[52] Bourdieu, "Le champ littéraire", 16-18.

older research has implicitly or explicitly done, is highly unfair, because it evaluates literature through a very modern lens in which originality and a strong authorial voice are much more highly valued than mastery of stylistic forms of expression, and because it misunderstands the vibrant sphere of literary interaction and variation found in the medieval Arabic literary tradition. In that perspective, insights from recent studies in comparative literature in which literature is understood "from within", such as the work of the above-mentioned Rebecca Gould, but also that of Thomas Bauer, Muhsin al-Musawi, and Shahab Ahmed will be useful points of reference that I will regularly come back to. More specifically, I will also regularly refer to concepts from the Arabic rhetorical tradition, for which I have especially made use of Pierre Cachia's "edition" (in fact a summary and systematisation) of the twelfth / eighteenth century handbook of *badīʿ* written by ʿAbd al-Ghanī al-Nābulsī, a relatively late but accessible and comprehensive guide for this complex field of various figures of speech.[53]

This focus on the importance of linguistic artifice in my analysis brings me to a last theoretical remark that may be said to run throughout the three levels of my theoretical analysis, namely my understanding of "discourse" and its derived form "discursive". A notoriously flexible term that often derails into meaninglessness, I see discourse essentially as a semiotic, inherently relational and engaging linguistic construction. To link it with Bourdieu's theory, "discourse" in my understanding denotes the specific forms of language use by which authors expressed their engagements with the field of social practice in which they are taking up a social position. Considering the dominant stress on linguistic ability in the social circles in which our authors moved and in which they performed their claims to preeminence, discourse is a useful word to denote practices of linguistic meaning making that functioned within these contexts. Specifically, this means I will be referring to discourse when talking about the importance of registers and stylistics, but also when talking about specific textual representations, ranging from a single word to entire chapters and books which develop sustained arguments that are especially meaningful within their historical context. Discourse is as such a strongly contextual phenomenon, hence the importance of devoting extended attention to the various contexts in which we should our authors' discursive constructions in Part 1. The importance of context for discourse means that discourse is usually also much more broadly understood as a social phenomenon of power in the Foucauldian sense, with wide ranging implications concerning power relations and the ways in which semiotics and language broker such relations.

[53] ʿAbd al-Ghanī al-Nābulsī, *The Arch Rhetorician, or, The Schemer's Skimmer: A Handbook of Late Arabic badīʿ*, ed. and transl. P. Cachia (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1998). Considering the "static" quality of the field, I believe the use of this "late" text is not really problematic, especially as it very clearly built on and referred extensively to an old tradition.

Bourdieu's concept of "habitus" is important here, for the normative (though evolving) social practices and often unspecified codes of conduct, profoundly influenced the specific forms discursive utterings took; it is the habitus which in large part defined the evolving meanings of words, phrases, expressions, etc. often beyond their immediate lexical meanings. Furthermore, the relationship of discourse to power is in the context of the sources studied here almost self-evident, considering the close ties of the linguistic utterances of our authors to the circles of the political authorities. However, this relationship and the forms of discourse coming out of it should be problematised to allow for a multidirectional view of interactions, as I will be doing in my criticism of what I call the legitimisation narrative (1.2.2. and throughout this dissertation). Discourse is as such not only an instrument *of* power but also actively reproduces it. It will be my contention in this dissertation that our authors made use of a variety of discourses in both the strictly linguistic and more broadly social meanings to negotiate their own positions of power vis-à-vis those who held politically or symbolically powerful positions.

In this interpretation *sīra* becomes much more than simply "biography", it becomes one type of large scale discursive expression by which agents could both perform their social claims to excellence and in doing so negotiate their social positions. This is of course true of any text intending to engage an audience, especially one of strong literary ambitions, but the specific relations to contexts of real political power – the sultan, amirs, and other powerful agents – with which our authors engaged through the writing of *sīra* makes it into an especially relevant corpus to study.

Part One: Contexts

Chapter 1
The "Mamluk" sultanate: between continuity and innovation

The kingship of al-Malik al-Ṣāliḥ Najm al-Dīn Ayyūb.
[about nine blank lines]
Al-Muʿizz [Aybak] took possession of the lands of Egypt in the year 648. And in that year al-Nāṣir [Yūsuf, of the Ayyūbid clan] took possession of Damascus. The death of al-Muʿizz was in the year 654 and in that year [al-Muʿizz and Shajar al-Durr's] son al-Manṣūr [ʿAlī] became king. Al-Malik al-Muẓaffar [Quṭuz] took possession of the lands of Egypt in the year 658. Al-Muẓaffar annihilated the Tatars at ʿAyn Jālūt in the year 658. Al-Muẓaffar was killed in the year 658. The dawla of al-Ẓāhir: al-Malik al-Ẓāhir [Baybars] took possession of the lands of Egypt and Syria in the year 658, and he took possession of al-Bīra in the year [6]60, and he took possession of Karak and Homs in the year 661. [...] The dawla of al-Manṣūr: al-Malik al-Manṣūr Qalāwūn al-Alfī took possession of the lands of Egypt and Syria in the year 678. Al-Malik al-Manṣūr annihilated the Tatars at Homs in the year 680.[1]

So begins an anonymous Arabic historical text preserved in a manuscript held by the Bibliothèque Nationale de France in Paris.[2] It continues to detail similar information until the third sultanate of al-Nāṣir Muḥammad (about whom, see below) and then

[1] Anonymous, *Tawārīkh mulūk al-Islām (Histories of the kings of Islam),* BnF, MS Arabe 2309, folios 123r-123v. Nine lines detailing Baybars' conquests and campaigns and the short reign of his son Bereke left out. To avoid cluttering this first page with a long Arabic quotation and to give a more full Arabic rendering of the text, I have reproduced the two pages on the basis of which this translation is made in Appendix B.
[2] The first part of the manuscript is composed of an extract from the *Rasāʾil ikhwān al-ṣafā (*"The Brethren of Purity") (6r-122v), the history part is on 123r-126v, followed by two short letters: one sent and one received by Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn (127r-128v).

switches to an account of the famous and in many ways paradigmatic sixth / twelfth century ruler of Egypt and Syria, Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn. Compared to much historiography circulating in the later seventh / thirteenth and early eighth / fourteenth centuries, this work seems to have little to offer:[3] it is hardly more than a list, almost as bare as the *Annals of Saint Gall* famously quoted by Hayden White.[4] Yet this short text does succeed in summarising the basic political narrative found in the *sīra*'s, and is as much the result of an endeavour to form a narrative understanding of time's passing as that of our authors. Although the *sīra*'s clearly present a much more fleshed out *narrative* of history, the basics of those narratives were largely similar to that presented by the anonymous author who wrote this overview of the alternation of kingship and its concomitant military achievements. This basic list-like narrative was probably written by a (semi-)contemporary of Shāfiʿ b. ʿAlī judging by its petering out during the third reign of al-Nāṣir Muḥammad and its implicit appraisal of Syro-Egyptian kingship as entering a distinct new phase starting from al-Ṣāliḥ Ayyūb. That is, when the Ayyūbid *dawla* made way for a succession of mostly military rulers, which would later be called the *dawlat al-atrāk,* the "state of the Turks" (more on this phrase below in 1.2.1.). By the early years of the eighth / fourteenth century, this historiographical idea had already gained much currency and it has been greatly stressed by modern scholars in their eagerness to demarcate dynasties and historical events of a distinctly "Mamluk" sultanate.[5] It is thus a fitting introduction to this first chapter which consists of two sections: a first will render in broad strokes the general historical events which the *sīra*'s describe, while the second will problematise some of the general evaluations of that historical period formulated by modern scholars, and highlight the ways in which this dissertation aims to contribute to a better understanding.

[3] At least one comparable text is known, written by an author who also lived contemporary to our authors. However, the historical scope is much larger and discusses all those who ever ruled Egypt, albeit all in very brief fashion: al-Hāshimī al-ʿAbbāsī al-Ṣafadī, *Nuzhat al-mālik wa-l-mamlūk fī mukhtaṣar sīrat man wuliyya Miṣr wa-l-mulūk,* ed. ʿUmar Tadmurī (Sidon-Beirut: al-Maktaba l-ʿaṣriyya, 2003), esp. 145ff.

[4] H. White, "The Value of Narrativity in the Representation of Reality", *Critical Inquiry* 7/1 (1980), 11.

[5] For a relatively early evaluation of "*al-dawla l-Qāhira l-Turkiyya*" as a new political entity, see Baybars al-Manṣūrī's introduction to his early eighth / fourteenth century chronicle *Zubdat al-fikra fī tārīkh al-hijra,* ed. D.S. Richards (Beirut: Dār al-nashr, 1998), 1-2. The basic historiographical text by al-Hāshimī al-ʿAbbāsī al-Ṣafadī also speaks of of *Dawlat al-Turk. Nuzhat al-mālik,* 145.

1.1 Historical horizon

The texts that will be analysed in this dissertation were all produced during the first century of the so-called "Mamluk" sultanate's rule over large swathes of territory in Egypt, Syria, and the Ḥijāz. As in the quote above, the historical starting point for that regime is conventionally given as 648 / 1250, when the last Ayyubid sultan of Egypt, Tūrānshāh, was assassinated by his military commanders (*amīr*, pl. *umarāʾ*, commonly rendered as amir in English) who then delegated authority to one of their own, and its end date as 923 / 1517, when the Ottomans executed its last sultan. More precisely, the chronological window of time dealt with by our authors can be defined as starting with the last years of the reign of al-Ṣāliḥ Ayyūb (d. 647 / 1249), the last Ayyubid sultan to have his supreme authority recognised by the other members of the Ayyubid clan who ruled various dominions in Egypt and Syria, and ending in 709 / 1309. This last date is the point at which the only known fragment of Shāfiʿ b. ʿAlī's *sīra* of the great fourteenth century sultan al-Nāṣir Muḥammad (d. 741 / 1341) is cut off, shortly after having detailed that sultan's third and final ascension of the throne. As we do not know at which point Shāfiʿ b. ʿAlī finished writing this last *sīra*, it is best to extend our historical horizon to 730 / 1330, the year in which he died. This is of course only true as far as the textual contents are concerned. The horizon will be opened up until the very recent past when taking into account the various audiences that have engaged with the *sīra*'s in Part Three. As much of my analysis and discussion will be thematic rather than chronological or single-text based, a brief overview of the happenings between the late 640s / 1240s and 730s / 1330s will be given here at the outset to situate my analysis in the conventional historical story.

The denominator "Mamluk" originates from the fact that the ruling elites in the sultanate were throughout two and a half centuries dominated by freed military slaves — the Arabic term *mamlūk* (pl. *mamālīk*) means "owned" and was commonly used to refer to slaves, especially in military contexts. These elites had started their careers in the lands they would eventually rule as *mamlūk*s in the retinue of either the sultan, or one of his high-ranking amirs, to then rise in the military hierarchy to become amirs themselves. In the years before his death al-Ṣāliḥ Ayyūb had greatly increased the numbers of his personal *mamlūks* to strengthen his personal grip on power. These *mamlūks* were stationed in a castle on the Rawḍa island on the river Nile (*baḥr*) in Cairo, hence the denominator Baḥrī/Baḥriyya, which has been used extensively in the twentieth century to refer to the first phase of the sultanate's rule, when most — but not

all — sultans were either part of this Baḥrī regiment, or descendants of them.[6] Here too, several of them had ascended the ranks to become important military commanders who were very closely involved in decisions of military but also more general political nature. When al-Ṣāliḥ Ayyūb died unexpectedly during the Battle of al-Manṣūra against Louis IX's crusader force, power devolved to his son Tūrānshāh. However, almost immediately after arriving in Egypt to take up the throne the latter alienated his father's amirs by appointing his own amirs to positions of power.[7] After the crusader force was defeated and Louis IX captured, a number of Ṣāliḥī amirs, among them Baybars and the regiment's leader Fāris al-Dīn Aqtāy, eventually conspired to kill Tūrānshāh. After this regicide, power briefly passed to al-Ṣāliḥ's widow Shajar al-Durr and then to one of al-Ṣāliḥ's own amirs, who took up the regnal title al-Muʿizz Aybak. Ayyubid rulers in Syria refused to recognise either sultan however, despite the fact that Aybak married Shajar al-Durr and installed a figurehead Ayyubid child sultan whom he claimed to serve as guardian, measures that are conventionally read as intending to establish his reign as continuous with that of al-Ṣāliḥ Ayyūb.

This veneer of explicit continuity was broken in 651 / 1254, when al-Muʿizz Aybak had the above mentioned Fāris al-Dīn Aqtāy killed, as the latter had grown to be a major challenge to Aybak's position of power. Afterwards Aybak took over direct rule of the sultanate by deposing the figurehead Ayyubid child sultan. Fearing for their own lives, Baybars and the majority of the other Ṣāliḥī amirs fled towards Syria, where they sought refuge with various Ayyubid princes. Baybars and a number of others ended up serving the Ayyubid sultan of Damascus, al-Nāṣir Yūsuf (d. 659 / 1261). While in Syria, Baybars and his amirs launched several attacks against Egypt, but when Mongol forces led by Hülegü (d. 663 / 1265) continued westward after their conquest of Baghdād in 656 / 1258, Baybars decided to join with the Egyptians, by now lead by sultan al-Muẓaffar Quṭuz, who had prevailed in Egyptian power struggles after Aybak's demise, to withstand the Mongols. After conquering Damascus, Hülegü returned eastwards to attend to the succession of the Mongol Great Khan and left behind a smaller force to deal with the Egyptian forces. This Mongol army and the Egyptian army clashed on the

[6] It was a common practice to refer to former *mamlūks* by such names, most usually linked specifically to their former owner. Below I will for example refer to Ṣāliḥī, Ẓāhirī, and Manṣūrī amirs, i.e. amirs that started their careers respectively in the *mamlūk* regiments of al-Ṣāliḥ Ayyūb, al-Ẓāhir Baybars, and al-Manṣūr Qalāwūn. This naming practice predates the seventh / thirteenth century and was already widespread in the fourth / tenth century. See, for example: Roy P. Mottahedeh, *Loyalty and Leadership in an Early Islamic Society* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980), 86-87.

[7] This run of events is very much a topos of late medieval Arabic historiography. Similar stories are told about al-Saʿīd Bereke and al-Ashraf Khalīl. It has been argued before that the depiction of Tūrānshāh in some of the period's historiography is characterised by a high level of dramatisation, similar to how historical characters are fictionalised in later popular epics. T. Herzog, "Romans populaires arabes: de l'historiographie au roman, du roman à l'historiographie", in *Écrire l'histoire de son temps (Europe et monde arabe),* ed. Richard Jacquemond (Paris: L'harmattan, 2005), 101.

twenty-fifth of Ramaḍān 658 / third of September 1260 at ʿAyn Jālūt in the Galilee, where the Egyptian army perhaps somewhat unexpectedly won the battle. Perhaps even more important than this victory, which is often lauded as the first Muslim victory against the hitherto considered invincible Mongols, was what happened on the victorious army's return journey: a number of amirs, according to some sources lead by Baybars, killed Quṭuz and power subsequently passed to Baybars who took the regnal title al-Malik al-Ẓāhir.

Baybars' seventeen year reign is conventionally seen as a period in which the groundwork for the "Mamluk" sultanate's enduring political system was laid.[8] As the first long-reigning sultan since al-Ṣāliḥ Ayyūb, as well as the first to bring both Egypt and Syria under his control again, Baybars is also credited with initiating a number of important institutions that would define politics for the following centuries: the reinstatement of the Abbasid caliphate in Cairo shortly after his accession to the sultanate, and the installation of four chief Qāḍī's for each of the four law schools (*madhhab,* pl. *madhāhib*) in 663 / 1265.[9] His persona would also continue to loom large in later periods: al-Ẓāhir Barqūq would for example much employ Baybars' image in his "restoration" project after ending the reign of the Qalāwūnid dynasty in the late fourteenth century,[10] and in Ottoman times a popular epic, the *Sīrat Baybars,* would grow to enormous popularity. In modern history he was even appropriated as a national hero of Kazakhstan and became the protagonist of a Syrian TV-soap called *al-Ẓāhir Baybars.* Much of that image derives from his achievements in conquering several Crusader territories, most prominently Antioch and Caesarea, and successfully fighting Mongol armies, such as at the battle of Elbistan / Abulustayn in Anatolian Seljuq territory, which was the culmination of years of complex but tense relations between local Anatolian rulers, the Egyptian sultanate, and the Īlkhānid Mongol state. Shortly after his return to Damascus from that battle, he died and was buried in the mausoleum he had erected in Damascus.

Despite Baybars' preparations for a smooth succession by making his son al-Saʿīd Bereke co-sultan and marrying him to the daughter of one of his most prominent amirs, Bereke's reign did not last very long. Similar to Tūrānshāh before him, Bereke seems to

[8] See for example: J. Hathaway, "Mamluk 'Revivals' and Mamluk Nostalgia in Ottoman Egypt", in: *The Mamluks in Egyptian and Syrian Politics and Society,* eds. M. Winter & A. Levanoni (Leiden: Brill, 2004), 389. A more substantiated discussion of the issue can be found in: W.W. Clifford, *State Formation and the Structure of Politics in Mamluk Syro-Egypt, 648-741 A.H./1250-1340 C.E.,* ed. S. Conermann (Bonn: Bonn University Press, 2013), 18ff.

[9] Both innovations have been much studied. For the former, see the most recent discussion in: M. Banister, "'Naught Remains to the Caliph but his Title': Revisiting Abbasid Authority in Mamluk Cairo", *MSR* 18 (2014-2015), 219-245. For the latter, see an overview of the debate in: Y.Rapoport, "Legal Diversity in the Age of *Taqlīd:* The Four Chief *Qāḍī*s Under the Mamluks", *Islamic Law and Society,* 10/2 (2003), 210-213.

[10] C. Onimus, "Les émirs dans le sultanat mamelouk sous les sultans Barqūq et Faraǧ (784-815/1382-1412)" (Unpublished PhD thesis, École pratique des hautes études, 2013), 185-188.

have tried to strengthen his own power base by dismissing amirs from Ṣāliḥī and Ẓāhirī backgrounds to appoint his own amirs to positions of authority, and in the process alienated these still powerful earlier elites. Our sources tell us that Qalāwūn al-Alfī, who had in the latter years of Baybars' sultanate grown much in prominence in his retinue, emerged as de facto leader of these disgruntled amirs. The situation eventually came to a head and after mediations Bereke resigned to Karak and was replaced by his infant brother al-ʿĀdil Salāmīsh, who however reigned for only one month. Eventually Qalāwūn deposed Salāmīsh as well, and ascended the throne himself, taking the regnal title al-Manṣūr, and thus ending Baybars' short-lived dynastic project. This whole phase is again taken as crucial in the account of Qalāwūn's pre-sultanate years by Shāfiʿ b. ʿAlī, who recounts these years in heroic fashion, akin to how Ibn ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir had recounted Baybars' trials in the 1250s — Ibn ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir's own account of Qalāwūn's pre-sultanate years is not known to have survived and does not seem to have been quoted by later historians.

Qalāwūn's reign can in many ways be seen as a continuation of Baybars' reign: he too actively propounded his image of what Anne Troadec has dubbed a "sultan de guerre" by defeating a new Mongol invasion at the Battle of Homs and conquering a number of further Crusader outposts, most prominently the city of Tripoli. Qalāwūn's grip on power did not go unchallenged however, and early on in his reign he had to deal with, among other setbacks, a defection of one of the most powerful amirs in the sultanate, Shams al-Dīn Sunqur al-Ashqar, who proclaimed himself sultan in Damascus.[11] Much of his reign had to deal with restoring order in Syria, and like in the case of Baybars, our authors present an image of a sultan who is perpetually on the move between Cairo and Syria. Aside from his military undertakings, Qalāwūn's reign is also important for the foundation of one of the largest *waqf*-endowed institutions of Cairo up to that point: the Manṣūriyya complex, which included a hospital (*bīmaristān*), a *madrasa*, and a mausoleum (*qubba*) and which was situated right in the middle of Cairo's highly symbolic and ceremonial thoroughfare *bayn al-qaṣrayn*.

Qalāwūn had prepared to be succeeded by his son al-Ṣāliḥ ʿAlī, but the latter's premature death in 1288 obliged the sultan to reluctantly name his other adult son Khalīl as successor.[12] During the preparations for the conquest of Acre, the last remaining major crusader city, Qalāwūn died unexpectedly, and the conquest itself was

[11] Linda Northrup has called this an "attempt to restore Syria to its status as an autonomous province in the Ayyubid tradition", in: *From Slave to Sultan: The Career of al-Manṣūr Qalāwūn and the Consolidation of Mamluk Rule in Egypt and Syria (678-679 A.H./1279-1290 A.D.)* (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner, 1998), 178.

[12] The reluctance to appoint certain sons as heirs may also be seen as a historiographical topos. Similar accounts are for example related about al-Ṣāliḥ Ayyūb's relationship to his son Tūrānshāh, and in a different context, we may also see it in accounts about the "good emperor" Marcus Aurelius' relationship to his erratic heir Commodus.

completed by the new sultan al-Ashraf Khalīl, who thus started off his reign with a major victory that was widely praised in correspondence and poetry. The rest of his short reign was however mired in struggles akin to those of al-Saʿīd Bereke before him: in trying to replace the earlier balance of power, by appointing amirs of his own choosing he too clashed with the powerful factions who had dominated politics before his ascension. Even worse, like Tūrānshāh and Quṭuz before him, al-Ashraf Khalīl was murdered by a group of amirs, who put his underage brother Muḥammad on the throne with the regnal title al-Malik al-Nāṣir.

Neither al-Ashraf Khalīl's murder, nor al-Nāṣir Muḥammad's first reign are recorded in any of the surviving parts of the corpus, which is most detailed for the reigns of Baybars and Qalāwūn and peters out for the following years due to incomplete manuscript survival. Thus it may suffice to say that al-Nāṣir Muḥammad's initial reign was quickly cut short when he was deposed and succeeded by al-ʿĀdil Kitbughā, and then al-Manṣūr Lājīn, both powerful amirs from the Manṣūriyya (Qalāwūn's) regiment. When the latter was murdered, the new strong men among the amirs reinstalled al-Nāṣir Muḥammad in 698 / 1299. He would now reign for a longer period but remained dominated by the two Manṣūrī amirs Baybars al-Jāshnikīr and Sayf al-Dīn Salār. The surviving part of Shāfiʿ b. ʿAlī's *sīra* starts during this period and initially shows political decision-making as heavily dominated by these two agents. However, the most developed bit of the *sīra* deals with al-Nāṣir Muḥammad's move to Karak, his resignation of the sultanate, and the ascension of Baybars al-Jāshnikīr as sultan. The latter reigned for less than a year, after which al-Nāṣir Muḥammad finally returned to Cairo for his third and longest reign, which would last until his death in 741 / 1341. The manuscript of Shāfiʿ's *sīra* does not take us far beyond his third ascension, however, as it is cut off in the year 710 / 1310 and we do not know at which point he concluded this text. In any case, we do know from several other contemporary and later sources that al-Nāṣir Muḥammad would during this third reign become arguably the most powerful ruler of the sultanate, initiating an age that was in more than one respect a period of glory: a final peace was settled with the Mongols in 722 / 1323, and there was agricultural and economic prosperity to a degree that would not be equalled for several centuries.

Insofar as it is relevant to focus on later developments, which should in any case not take us fundamentally beyond al-Nāṣir Muḥammad's reign in this and the second part of this study, these will be dealt with as they appear relevant further on. This will especially be the case concerning the changes in the make-up and leadership of the chancery, which directly concerned our authors and can thus be suspected to have some influence on their historiographical outlook. After having given this general overview, I now need to turn to some general considerations of a conceptual nature.

1.2 Conceptual considerations

The above presented political narrative is by now a well known one, as both medieval authors and modern scholars have presented it more or less as such. However, instead of merely taking over this narrative as a form of received knowledge, it is worthwhile to examine the origins and functions of this particular historical schema. Rather than a classical state of the art of Mamluk studies, I will in the following mostly focus on the debates on the evaluation of the political system as distinctively "Mamluk", as it offers both a gateway into presenting the political contexts which should be kept in mind when evaluating the source material and a background against which my criticism may be formulated. Following from this discussion, I will develop the ramifications of the standard interpretation of Mamluk history for the evaluation of its political discourses of legitimacy, especially as it has been pronounced in the context of the sultanic *sīra*'s. This section thus moves from a general state of the art on the "Mamluk" political system, based primarily on secondary sources, to the specific interpretations made of it in the context of the corpus studied in this dissertation, in which I will introduce evidence from the primary sources to criticise this evaluation.

1.2.1 The "Mamluk" sultanate

As noted above, the sultanate that ruled Egypt and Syria from the second half of the seventh / thirteenth until the early ninth / sixteenth centuries is commonly referred to as "Mamluk", because its political elites were dominated by men who had served at one point in one of various *mamlūk* regiments. These regiments could be either those of the sultan or those of powerful amirs who had acquired the right to own specified numbers of *mamlūks*. Because these elites originated in non-Arabic, non-Islamic lands, spoke Qipchaq Turkish amongst each other — even when they were mostly of Circassian descent in later centuries — and spent much of their time in military barracks or in the citadels that dominated the great cities, it has been commonly claimed that this was a "foreign elite" that lived isolated from and nearly oblivious to the local Arabic-speaking population.[13] This idea should now definitely be abandoned, at least as far as the sultanate's major cities are concerned, thanks to a growing number of studies that have

[13] See for one example among many: D. Howard, "The Mamluks", in *Venice and the Islamic World: 828-1797,* ed. S. Carboni (New York-New Haven-London: The Metropolitan Museum of Art & Yale University Press, 2007), 74

highlighted myriads of multilateral and multifaceted relations established between the authorities and the local populations via a great variety of household politics.[14]

The fact that this idea of a secluded elite is still widespread indirectly highlights the exoticising tendency of researchers to stress the distinctness of Syro-Egyptian politics in this period. Several other aspects contribute to this view, foremost of which is the sultanate's non-heredity of elite membership, especially of the sultanate itself. Much has for example been made of the phrase "*al-mulk ʿaqīm*", meaning "kingship is barren", which appears already in early sources — indeed, even in some of the *sīra*'s studied here[15] — but which becomes especially widespread in later centuries,[16] and which has been taken to mean that non-heredity was the norm for succession. Several scholars have suggested that ruling the polity was in principle not hereditary, but rather worked according to a system of *primus inter pares*, where the agent most able to garner the necessary strength and partisan support to keep other parties in check would rule, in a sort of crossbreed between autocracy — represented by the theoretically but in reality only periodically all-powerful sultan — and oligarchy — represented by the military elites who struggled for power or divided it amongst themselves.[17] Because of the

[14] For a modern synthesis of the extensive literature on the period's political institution, its particular form of military slavery, and the social, political, and cultural practices in which *mamlūks* participated, see: Julien Loiseau, *Les Mamelouks: XIIIe-XVIe siècle* (Paris: Seuil, 2014). On the social integration of mamlūks and local elites specifically, see: Matthieu Eychenne, *Liens personnels, cliéntelisme et réseaux de pouvoir dans le sultanat mamelouk (milieu XIIIe-fin XIVe siècle)* (Damascus/Beirut: Presses de l'ifpo, 2013).

[15] *Faḍl*, 166. A variant phrase appears in a long elegy for the death of al-Manṣūr Qalāwūn's first son al-Ṣāliḥ ʿAlī in this line:

قد مهّد المُلكَ العقيم بهيبةٍ راعتْ وما راعت ذوي الإهمال

He has prestigiously freed the infertile kingship of obstacles
which thrill and do not let flourish the negligent ones

Note Shāfiʿ's rather emphatic use of *jināṣ* (paronomasia) with seemingly identical forms of the two weak verbs *r-w-ʿ* (to be thrilled) and *r-y-ʿ* (to flourish) in the second hemistych. Shāfiʿ also uses another variant phrase in the *taqlīd* (diploma of investiture) written for al-Nāṣir Muḥammad's third ascension, describing al-Nāṣir Muḥammad's ascension of the throne as "*tasannama sarīr mulki-hi l-ʿaqīm*" ("he ascended the barren seat of his kingship"). Arabe 1705, 101v. ʿIzz al-Dīn b. Shaddād's biography of Baybars also uses the term in an episode unrelated to the sultanate of Baybars, but dealing with political issues in Tunis. *Tārīkh al-Malik al-Ẓāhir*, 190. That same text also includes an elegy written for Baybars by the amir-poet Nāṣir al-Dīn Ḥasan b. al-Naqīb al-Kinānī al-ʿAsqalānī in which the phrase appears. *Tārīkh al-Malik al-Ẓāhir*, 250.

[16] Albrecht Fuess used it as denomination for a last historical phase he distinguished in the sultanate's history between 1412 and 1517, in his review article "Mamluk Politics", in *Ubi Sumus, Quo Vademus? : Mamluk Studies - State of the Art,* ed. S. Conermann (Bonn: Bonn University Press, 2013), 99. Fuess further distinguished a "Law of the Turk" phase in the sultanate's early period (1250-1310), which was followed by a Qalāwūnid dynastic phase (1310-1382) and then a mixed dynastic-meritocratic phase (1382-1412). I will not be using this periodisation as I believe it fails to adequately take into account the fact that all the phases that are here distinguished actually represent tendencies that were present throughout the entire history of the sultanate.

[17] See, among others: A. Levanoni, "The Mamluk Conception of the Sultanate", *International Journal of Middle East Studies,* 26/3 (1994), 374 and passim; idem, "The Mamlūks in Egypt and Syria: The Turkish Mamlūk Sultanate (648-784/1250-1382) and the Circassion Mamlūk Sultanate (784-923/1382-1517)", in *The New Cambridge History of Islam, Part 2: Egypt and Syria (Eleventh Century Until the Ottoman Conquest),* ed. M. Fierro (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 237-284; L.S. Northrup, "The Baḥrī Mamluk Sultanate, 1250-

essentially competitive nature of political dynamics in the period, P.M. Holt has even argued that the efforts of several sultans to establish their descendants as heirs "were working against the grain of Mamluk society". Holt thought it was a "remarkable" anomaly that during the bulk of the fourteenth century various sons, grandsons and great-grandsons of Qalāwun ruled Egypt and Syria in a hereditary dynasty, symbolic though it may often have been, and claimed that the repeated killings and usurpations of other periods were the political norm.[18] Ulrich Haarmann even remarked that a prevalent idea that whosoever killed the previous king inherits kingship, the so-called "Law of the Turks", was at work during the early phase of the sultanate.[19]

Such traditional evaluations are still widely cited, but they in fact fail to do justice to the wide variety of political practices evident from the period's rich source repertoire. For even if we accept that these struggles between dynastic and meritocratic tendencies were a result of experimentation in the sultanate's early years or that they were only a "phase", how do we account for the fact that in later periods hereditary impulses also appeared regularly, and that even al-Ẓāhir Barqūq, who ended the reign of the Qalāwūnid dynasty in 784 / 1382, was succeeded by his son al-Nāṣir Faraj? It is true that Faraj, like most other sons who inherited the throne from their fathers or brothers, was not a very effective ruler and acted as a rather symbolic head of state while several factions struggled for power in the citadel. But the fact that so many of these sons actually ascended the throne, constituting more than half of the sultanate's rulers in numbers, surely means that heredity was at least widely practiced, if not necessarily normative.[20] To make sense of this seeming paradox, it has more recently been stressed that the late medieval Syro-Egyptian sultanate was not all that different from the polities that surrounded it geographically and chronologically.[21] Structures of authority and traditions of leadership established in earlier centuries throughout West Asia were taken over and developed further, not as a decisive break but as a natural evolution of

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1390" in *The Cambridge History of Egypt, Volume One: Islamic Egypt, 640-1517,* ed. C.F. Petry (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 254.

[18] P.M. Holt, "Succession in the Early Mamluk Sultanate", in *XXIII. Deutscher Orientalistentag vom 16. bis 20. September 1985 in Würzburg,* ed. E. von Schuler (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag Wiesbaden, 1989), 148. This point was recently reiterated by N. Hofer in "The Ideology of Decline and the Jews of Ayyubid and Mamluk Syria", in *Muslim-Jewish Relations in the Middle Islamic Period,* ed. S. Conermann (Bonn: V&R University Press, 2017), 100.

[19] U. Haarmann, "Regicide and the 'Law of the Turks'", in *Intellectual studies on Islam: essays written in honor of Martin B. Dickson,* ed. M.M. Mazzaoui (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1990), 127-135. W. Flinterman has discussed the specific literary-historiographical usages of this concept in "Killing and Kinging: Altaic notions of kingship and the legitimation of al-Ẓāhir Baybars' usurpation of the Mamluk Sultanate, 1249-1260", *Leidschrift* 27/1 (2012), 31-49.

[20] For two related overviews and insightful critiques of this debate, see: J. Van Steenbergen, "The Mamluk Sultanate as a Military Patronage State: Household Politics and the Case of the Qalāwūnid *bayt* (1279-1382)", *JESHO* 56 (2013), 190-193, and idem, "Caught between heredity and merit: the amir Qūsūn and the legacy of al-Nāṣir Muḥammad b. Qalāwūn (d. 1341)", *BSOAS* 78/3 (2015), 430-434.

[21] Ira M. Lapidus in fact already noted this in *Muslim Cities in the Later Middle Ages*, xiv.

systems of political authority. The heavy reliance on slaves in military contexts, for example, had in fact been an established tradition in the wider region for several centuries before, and many such slaves had climbed the social ladder to high positions of power.[22] Similarly, non-Arabic speaking military elites had been dominating the highest political circles ever since the Persian-speaking Buyids had taken over direct power over Baghdād from the Abbasid caliphate in the 10th century.

Marshall Hodgson already in the 1970s recognised the continuity of political formations in what he called the Islamic Middle Period (late fourth / tenth - early tenth / sixteenth centuries) in his influential evaluation of Islamicate — another term he famously coined to distinguish between Islam as a religious system, and the wider social, political, cultural, and economic contexts which it formed and engaged with — civilisation as a world system, *The Venture of Islam.*[23] At the same time, however, he noted a number of differences in state formation, especially with the coming of the Mongols. To interpret the nomadic system introduced by them, he applied the Weberian concept of the Military Patronage State.[24] Where Hodgson interpreted this as a distinctive feature of the Mongol political system, however, Michael Chamberlain later argued that it could also fruitfully be applied in evaluating the much earlier Saljuq and Ayyubid political systems, suggesting furthermore that the "Mamluk" sultanate was probably the most powerful of military patronage states.[25] Chamberlain's remark was more recently developed by Jo Van Steenbergen, who suggested the concept may be a useful analytical tool to make sense of the "Mamluk" period's perceived paradoxical coexistence of non-heredity and dynasticism. The Military Patronage State is basically defined by the fact that military elites, who took over political power in several regions after the disintegration of the Abbasid caliphate, constructed loose systems of redistribution of economic resources. In this redistribution of power and resources the military household (*bayt,* pl. *buyūt*) is key as socio-political integrator: by this loose institution military elites established themselves as leaders of a social household that went beyond direct family but included a large variety of clients and supporters, both from within the own family and social circles – i.e. people with *mamlūk* backgrounds – as among local

[22] As is evident from the dated but still useful overview of the institution of military slavery in the early centuries of Islam by D. Pipes, *Slave Soldiers and Islam: The Genesis of a Military System* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1981).

[23] The rationale behind these and other conceptualisations is laid out in *The Venture of Islam: Conscience and History in a World Civilization. Volume One: The Classical Age of Islam* (London: The University of Chicago Press, 1974), 57-60. Hodgson's evaluation has recently been critiqued by Shahab Ahmed in his magisterial *What is Islam? The Importance of Being Islamic* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2016), 157-175.

[24] Hodgson, *The Venture of Islam, Vol. 2: The Expansion of Islam in the Middle Periods* (400-410.

[25] In his book *Knowledge and Social Practice in Medieval Damascus, 1190-1350* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 28-37, he argues at considerable length for significant commonalities in political and social organisation across most of Eurasia due to the political predominance of what he calls "horse-warriors" and their households, clearly an idea related to his theoretisation of the Military Patronage State.

elites, whom they bound to themselves by redistributing wealth and power via a variety of patronage relations. Chamberlain as such could claim that "the state is no more than a collection of military households kept in check by the most powerful among them".[26] Such power relations between households also played within the context of sultanic succession and defined the extent to which dynastic and meritocratic impulses would dominate in any given period.

The most important relationship of revenue distribution by which the household consolidated their power was undoubtedly the *iqṭāʿ*, which has often been compared to European feudalism, but is essentially different in its non-hereditary status and the fact that it was never actually a personal property: the agricultural yield of specific land was given to military elites by the sultan in exchange for military service, but in principle returned to the sultan's treasury upon the demise of the *iqṭāʿ*-holder. In addition to this redistribution of economic capital, the relationship between a ruler and his adherents was also governed by symbolic redistribution. Social status was for example established by the accordance of (military) ranks or specific courtly offices — the former normally reserved for former *mamlūks,* but the latter also open to members of local elites — and was continuously consolidated in ritualised ceremonial. The handing out of robes of honour (*khilʿa, tashrīf*), of which we find plentiful reports in the period's historiographical works, including in the *sīra*'s studied here, is one of the most visible of such ceremonies, but other symbolic performances of elite status were common as well in courtly contexts (about which, see more below in 2.1.2). By way of these various economic and symbolic redistributions of status, the sultan bound military and local elites to his person and established his household as concomitant to the "state". Amirs copied these types of redistribution and ritual on a smaller scale in their own households, and as such large segments of the population were integrated in a diverse and informal household economy that was intimately related to processes of state formation.[27]

The centrality of the *bayt,* or household, in the political constellations of late medieval Egypt and Syria has long been recognised. Ira M. Lapidus took it as a structural institution of society in the period in his influential *Muslim Cities in the Later Middle Ages* in which he studied "the principles by which individuals, classes, and groups of men

[26] Michael Chamberlain, "Military Patronage States and the Political Economy of the Frontier, 1000-1250", in *A Companion to the History of the Middle East,* ed. Y. Choueiri (New Jersey: Wiley-Blackwell, 2008), 142.

[27] See for a study of how this worked under al-Nāṣir Muḥammad with a specific focus on cultural production, especially material culture: Willem Flinterman & Jo Van Steenbergen, "Al-Nasir Muhammad and the Formation of the Qalawunid State", in *Pearls on a String: Art in the Age of Great Islamic Empires,* ed. Amy Landau (Baltimore/Seattle: The Walters Art Museum/University of Washington Press, 2015), 87-113. On the households of amirs being similarly organised to that of the sultan, see David Ayalon, "Studies on the Structure of the Mamluk Army II", in *Muslims, Mongols and Crusaders: An Anthology of Articles Published in the* Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies, ed. G. Hawting (London: Routledge, 2005), 81.

were made into functioning communities".[28] Lapidus argued that neither the state nor its bureaucracy were central in these principles, but that the household formed the way in which state agents developed their influence and power in society by integrating "soldiers, servants, scribes, and officials, their families, and the people allied to them by marriage" into one diffuse but fundamentally connected system that formed the most important economic, social, and political force of the period.[29] Because much of the general revenue produced in the lands governed by the sultan was distributed in the form of *iqṭāʿ*s to the amirs to support their households, the economic system, based predominantly on grain agriculture, was effectively dominated by these households. Patrons as such accrued vast wealth, which they were able to distribute amongst their own clients as patronage.

One can see that, considering the vast redistribution of both wealth and power and the very personal relations by which that redistribution operated, state disintegration due to warring factions and elite competition was a constant threat. Indeed, earlier military patronages states such as the Saljuq empire and the Ayyubid confederation were definitely marked by phases of disintegration and recentering. Jo Van Steenbergen has argued that, at least during the Qalāwūnid dynastic period, the Military Patronage State of late medieval Egypt and Syria transcended the "territorial repercussions" of "the endemic tendency towards fragmentation of its elite households", because the various factions were able to find some kind of balance and stability under the umbrella of the Qalāwūnid state formation project.[30] There is in fact an oscillating effect between disintegration, when power was centered mostly in the hands of rival amiral households, and integration, when one such household (sometimes, but not always, that of the sultan) was able to gain the predominant position. Oligarchy and autocracy are as such only "two modes" of power practices in this specific multifaceted form of the Military Patronage State, but they do not contradict one another if we consider power itself as a contingent and fluid social factor.[31]

This all of course does not mean that there was no such thing as the "state", but that defining this entity means taking seriously the personal household relations that were crucial in its practical workings. The state was a socially generated and constantly reproduced phenomenon, but it did succeed in establishing and developing institutions and habitual practices that would prove lasting in one form or another. As we shall see in Chapter 2, there was for example certainly such a thing as a chancery that worked according to some institutional logic, although the relatively informal personal nature

[28] Lapidus, *Muslim Cities*, 3.
[29] Idem, 50.
[30] Van Steenbergen, "The Mamluk Sultanate as a Military Patronage State", 197.
[31] Ibidem, 213-214.

of power and hierarchy were important here too and these positions needed to be constantly negotiated.

If we want to understand what the state meant for contemporary authors, it is crucial to understand the term "*dawla*", commonly rendered in English as "state", but which in fact has a wide range of connotations beyond our modern understanding of the state, notably one related to "time". We have seen in the excerpt quoted at the start of this chapter that the anonymous historiographical text denoted each different sultan's reign as a different *dawla.* This is very common, and as a result Koby Yosef has suggested that the term would be more adequately rendered by "period of rule".[32] However, this would suggest that the term is somewhat interchangeable with another commonly used term: "*ayyām*", or "days", which explicitly denoted the temporal aspect of a ruler's authority in the past.[33] Perhaps more accurately would be to conceptualise a *dawla* as the project of authority establishment by a sultan or by a political formation with a sultan or in some cases even something we would designate as a dynasty as its symbolic figurehead (most notably with the various sons and grandsons of Qalāwūn), which figures more generally in *longue durée* processes of state formation.[34] In such a context, Jo Van Steenbergen has argued, the state is typified by the "production, reproduction and recycling of elites and practices in a succession of changing social orders".[35] This high degree of contingency does not mean that there was no such thing as the "state" outside of the specific political formation that happened to have congealed around a number of powerful agents at any given time, but rather that the particular ways in which the state functioned shifted across these political lines, and that "fragmented elite groups and individuals were invited to construct, produce and reproduce arrangements that created more transcendent effects of political community and social identity, and of legitimating continuity, which enabled to connect different social orders and their varying roles within them in non-dynastic ways".[36]

Such an understanding, while strongly focused on the particular agency of elite groups, and thus on construction rather than on structure, does presuppose that some normative practices of political order existed (or, had been socially generated) and that these were engaged with by these agents, especially in processes of constant

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[32] K. Yosef, "*Dawlat al-atrāk* or *dawlat al-mamālīk*? Ethnic Origin or Slave Origin as the Defining Characteristic of the Ruling Élite in the Mamluk Sultanate", *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam*, 39 (2012), 388-390.

[33] Note that the term appears in the title of one Ibn ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir's texts: *Tashrīf al-**ayyām** wa-l-ʿuṣūr fī sīrat al-Malik al-Manṣur*. For an earlier use of the term as denotation of a "period of rule", see the quote from Miskawayh (d. 421 /1030) in: R. Mottahadeh, *Loyalty and Leadership in an Early Islamic Society* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980), 69.

[34] J. Van Steenbergen, "'Mamlukisation' between social theory and social practice: An essay on reflexivity, state formation, and the late medieval sultanate of Cairo", *ASK Working Papers 22* (Bonn: Annemarie Schimmel Kolleg, 2015), 10-11.

[35] Idem, 36.

[36] Ibidem.

reproduction. The fact that the nominal authority of the sultan and the caliph were in themselves not challenged across various centuries means that these were normative state institutions at least to a nominal and important symbolical degree. Similarly, other institutions remained active throughout the Mamluk period and were not fundamentally challenged. For our purposes the most important of these is the Chancery, to which I shall be returning in more detail in the next chapter, but it may already be said that we can see several evolutions here too across time: there is for example a gradual emergence of the function of *kātib al-sirr,* the importance of which would be highly dependent on the specific agent holding the function. As we shall see as well, there is a tension present in the contemporary sources concerning this institution between the quite systematised institutional structures presented in a number of chancery manuals and the much more contingent engagements with these structures presented by various historical accounts. These representations need not be mutually exclusive however, as the very act of textually creating such an appearance is already a normative act in itself and actively (re)produces conceptualisations of the state and its institutions.[37] In other words, the texts that created particular textual realities of the state, may in turn also be said to have created its factual reality in the form of a more delineated self-perception as well.

Studying the state in this period thus involves negotiating this seeming paradox of an elusive state institution and its textual representations, and the following chapters will engage with this paradox in several ways, although it will not be my ultimate goal to "solve" this paradox. Rather, I aim to understand how we should view our authors and their texts in relation to these processes of state formation and state (re)production. One of the most important of such relationships which has been proposed in earlier research, that of "legitimisation", will be discussed and criticised now in more detail as it is crucial for the position I am taking in this dissertation.

1.2.2 Legitimisation

As is clear from the above, the "Mamluk" state was, like any other state, an inherently social phenomenon. That is, it was dependent on social relations established between powerful and less powerful agents who cooperated in systems of redistribution. The successful survival of such a system thus depends on the degree to which various interest groups kept each other in balance. In scholarly research one such relation has

[37] Idem, 16-17.

been especially pronounced: that between the religious or intellectual elites, or *ʿulamāʾ* on the one hand, and the authorities on the other. In exchange for a portion of wealth and power, redistributed in the form of stipends, official functions, and direct patronage, the *ʿulamāʾ* as guardians of Islamic law and society are said to have legitimised the position of power of political authorities in general.[38] That is, they translated their claims to authority both in discourse, by writing texts communicating and arguing for the ruler's "divine mandate" to rule, and in practice, by cooperating with or even working with the rulers in the general management of the state. As Chase Robinson has formulated it for Islamic historiography in general, historians as members of the "learned élites", "offered a medium through which states could broadcast claims about the past, present or future, legitimize themselves and undermine their critics".[39] This has by now become an extremely common line of interpretation, and while it has proven to be very useful in analysis, it has also resulted in a few unfortunate misrepresentations. Most importantly for our purposes, this interpretation relegates historians' authorial agency entirely to their relationship to rulers.[40]

In evaluations of the corpus of sultanic *sīra*'s the conveyors of legitimacy are a more narrow elite of chancery scribes rather than the broad category of the *ʿulamāʾ*.[41] For our corpus, several short articles by Peter M. Holt, in which he argued that these *sīra*'s were written to legitimise illegitimate rule on a historiographical level, have been highly influential. His basic assumption was that, because of the rulers' usurpations and non-Arab, non-Muslim descent, historiographical narratives were needed to legitimise the ruler's actions. These texts thus formulated a propagandistic image of the ideal sultan and twisted historical facts to fit heroic narratives of ideal rulership. As such, they

[38] This is a central idea in Lapidus' earlier quoted *Muslim Cities.* See also, Y. Lev, "Symbiotic Relations: Ulama and the Mamluk Sultans", *MSR* 13/1 (2009), 1-26. These are just two explicit examples, the idea may be found in many other studies.

[39] Robinson, *Islamic Historiography*, 119. See for another example: M. Eychenne, "Le sultan al-Ašraf Halīl et son vizir: Liens personnels et pratiques du pouvoir dans le sultanat mamlouk", *Annales Islamologiques* 39 (2005), 250.

[40] For a more balanced evaluation of the links between historians and ruling elites, see, K. Hirschler, "Islam: The Arabic and Persian Traditions, Eleventh-Fifteenth Centuries", in *The Oxford History of Historical Writing, volume 2: 400-1400,* eds. S. Foot & C.F. Robinson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 275-279, especially 277 on "legitimizing the powerful".

[41] J.H. Escovitz claimed that these may be seen as separate classes because more than half of *kuttāb al-sirr* he found in biographical dictionaries for the entire Mamluk period had either no or only a very limited background in "religious education." "Vocational Patterns of the Scribes of the Mamlūk Chancery", *Arabica,* 23/1 (1976), 50-51. Despite many other merits of this article which I will be using in more detail below, I will not be following this specific line of interpretation, as I believe Escovitz' evaluation of who should be considered an *ʿālim* is rather reductively limited to those persons with a background in *ḥadīth* studies or law. Even though many of the *kuttāb* of the period may not have been very active in the traditional "religious sciences", they were often considered as leading intellectuals of the time. It should furthermore be noted that *kuttāb al-sirr* were only a relatively small group of agents active within the chancery.

should in the first place be read as rhetorical constructions. The distinct claims to historical truth formulated by authors are subsumed in legitimising discourse.[42]

Many researchers have taken over Holt's assumption of the legitimising function of these *sīra*'s, such as Denise Aigle, Anne-Marie Eddé, Amina Elbendary, Remke Kruk, and Tahar Mansouri.[43] This line of reasoning has also been taken beyond the immediate context of the *sīra*'s themselves. Anne Broadbridge has for example extrapolated Holt's ideas to the study of diplomacy as a battlefield of ideology and defined Mamluk ideology of rulership as strongly linked to the question of legitimacy.[44] It is also echoed in more general works, such as Chase F. Robinson's Islamic Historiography, who asks:

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[42] Holt's most comprehensive argumentation on the entire corpus can be found in: "The Sultan as Ideal Ruler: Ayyubid and Mamluk Prototypes", in *Süleyman the Magnificent and His Age: The Ottoman Empire in the Early Modern World,* eds. M. Kunt & C. Woodhead (New York: Longman, 1995), 122-37. However, he formulated the basic argument already much earlier in these two articles focused on select texts: "The Virtuous Ruler in Thirteenth-Century Mamluk Royal Biographies", *Nottingham Medieval Studies* 24 (1980), 27-35; and "Three Biographies of al-Ẓāhir Baybars", in *Medieval Historical Writing in the Christian and Islamic Worlds,* ed. D.O. Morgan (London: School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London, 1982), 19-29. Variations on the themes of this articles can furthermore be found in the following more specific studies on Shāfiʿ b. ʿAlī's writings: "Some Observations on Shāfiʿ b. ʿAlī.'s Biography of Baybars", *Journal of Semitic Studies* 29 (1984), 123-130; "A Chancery Clerk in Medieval Egypt", *The English Historical Review* 101/400 (1986), 671-679; and "The Presentation of Qalāwūn by Shāfiʿ b. ʿAlī" in *Essays in Honor of Bernard Lewis: The Islamic World. From Classical to Modern Times,* eds. C.E. Bosworth, C. Issawi, R. Savory, & A.L. Udovitch (eds.) (Princeton: The Darwin Press, 1989), 141-50. The biographies are also used as important sources in several other articles of his, as well as in his monograph *Early Mamluk Diplomacy (1260-1290): Treaties of Baybars and Qalāwūn with Christian Rulers* (Leiden: Brill, 1995), where he translated a number of treaties and other assorted excerpts found in the texts of Ibn ʿAbd aẓ-Ẓāhir and Shāfiʿ b. ʿAlī.

[43] Updated and/or translated versions of Aigle's studies on the subject can now be found in: *The Mongol Empire between Myth and Reality: Studies in Anthropological History* (Leiden: Brill, 2015); A-M. Eddé, "Baybars et son double. De l'ambiguïté du souverain ideal", in *Le Bilad Al-Šam face aux mondes extérieurs. La perception de l'autre et la représentation du souverain,* ed. D. Aigle (Damascus/Beirut: Presses de L'Ifpo, 2012), 73-86; A.A. Elbendary, "The Sultan, the Tyrant, and the Hero: Changing Medieval Perceptions of Al-Zahir Baybars." *MSR* 5 (2001), 141-57; R. Kruk, "History and Apocalypse: Ibn Al-Nafîs' Justification of Mamluk Rule." *Der Islam* 72/2 (1995), 324-37; T. Mansouri, "Le Portrait Du Sultan Al-Manṣūr Qalāwūn D'après *Al-Faḍl Al-Ma'ṯūr Min Sīrat Al-Malik Al-Manṣūr* De Šāfiʿ B. ʿalī." in *Le Bilad Al-Šam face aux mondes extérieurs*, 87-97.

[44] She defines "Mamluk ideology" as based "consistently and exclusively on antiquated Islamic concepts and on a vision of the Mamluk sultan as a martial Guardian of Islam and Islamic society. The Mamluk sultans used this outdated model because they suffered from two serious, linked problems: the institution of slavery and a lack of lineage. The Mamluk slave institution meant that the Mamluks were singularly ill-suited to justify themselves as ruler. [...] [W]hen proclaiming their legitimacy to their own subjects the early Mamluks resorted to dynastic adoption from their predecessors, the defunct Ayyubids, which they achieved by continuing Ayyubid ceremonial practices. In addition, the Mamluk sultans consistently tried to develop their own dynasties as an alternate response to this lack of lineage, albeit with mixed results. The Mamluks also justified their rule at home by patronizing both the Islamic courts and the grievance courts (*maẓālim*), promoting themselves as warrior-kings, establishing architectural complexes, overseeing the prosecution of heresy and apostasy, and participating in processions, religious festivals or public displays of charity. Most importantly, the early Mamluks promised to protect their subjects from the Mongols." A. Broadbridge, *Kingship and Ideology in the Islamic and Mongol Worlds* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 12. See also her earlier article "Mamluk Legitimacy and the Mongols: The Reigns of Baybars and Qalāwūn", *MSR* 4 (2000), 91-118

> Why do we possess such a cluster of biographies of Saladin, Baybars (rg. 1260-1277) and Qalāwūn (rg. 1279-1290), especially when the biographical coverage is so spotty otherwise? At least for those writing contemporary history, the answer must be that each ruler saw in historiography the opportunity to (mis)represent his path to power.[45]

Robinson returns to this corpus a number of times, at another point arguing that "in the hands of their biographers, Ayyubid and Mamluk *usurpers* become legitimate *successors,*" and using these insights to inform his broader discussion of legitimisation.[46]

More recently, Anne Troadec, a student of Denise Aigle, has evaluated the corpus (minus the *sīra* of al-Nāṣir Muḥammad) in her doctoral thesis from a similar angle, as part of a three-pronged strategy of legitimisation instigated by the sultans themselves and carried out by the chancery. Together with epigraphy and correspondence these *sīra*'s constructed an image of the sultan to be communicated to the outside world, built around four core features: the sultan being chosen by God, his portrayal as an ideal ruler, the reference to models of the past, and the heroic centrality of warfare.[47] There is considerable overlap in these features, as well as within the different media of legitimisation: much of the correspondence is actually found in the *sīra*'s, and the wordings and themes of the epigraphic material often reappear in the other media. Picking up the reasoning from Holt and Aigle, Troadec argued that all these features, though diffuse in execution, were all meant as forms of propaganda to legitimise the sultan's reign and validate his rightful position on the throne.

As a final example of what I call the "legitimisation narrative", specifically focused on one of the texts studied here, consider Tahar Mansouri's study of Shāfiʿ b. ʿAlī's *sīra* of Qalāwūn:

> Ce texte, comme son titre l'indique, est une biographie, mais elle est sélective dans la mesure où le choix de notre auteur, qui était scribe d'al-Manṣūr Qalāwūn, va porter sur les bienfaits de son sultan et ne relate que ses mérites et ses hauts faits. *Cet écrit ressemble à un panégyrique, même s'il n'en est pas un. Il s'agit d'une biographie construite qui vise à légitimer le pouvoir de Qalāwūn, comme venant en réponse à quelque chose de non dit.* C'est pourquoi l'auteur s'est surtout attaché à exposer les mérites

[45] Robinson, *Islamic Historiography*, 166.
[46] Idem, 121.
[47] A. Troadec, "Les Mamelouks dans l'espace syrien", 113-148.

> de son maître. Celui-ci est sultan et ce n'est pas un hasard qu'il le soit, il a de multiples qualités que personne n'avait à son époque.[48]

Mansouri thus interpreted the primary aim of this text as presenting an idealised image of Qalāwūn, which would legitimise his reign. Like most modern researchers, Mansouri here moved beyond the unhelpful dichotomy of truth and fiction that is still quite present in Holt's writings, but did not make the important further step towards really evaluating the authorial intentions for writing such a text beyond the basic idea that it was meant to legitimise a sultan's (or his progeny's) position on the throne. This interpretation sees the writing of such a text very much as a top down affair, where the sultan directly or indirectly influenced the writing of historiography, and pushed the author's role into that of a creative propagandist. While it is possible to explain much of the content found in the *sīra*'s in this way, scholars have failed to properly evaluate the multiple intentions of authors and patrons and the wide-ranging constellations of meaning found in the texts. If we want to fully consider authorial and textual intentions, we must read them at least as much from the position from which they were produced as for whom they were intended.

In fact, our understanding of the intended audience of these texts, which is by most scholars supposed to be the sultan and a not specifically identified "public" to whom the image of sultanic legitimacy had to be communicated, is often highly hypothetical. With the possible exception of Ibn ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir's *sīra* of Baybars, we do not have any evidence to convincingly support the idea that the larger textual constructions of the *sīra*'s were requested by or read to any sultan. None of the texts explicitly name a patron or addressee in their introductions or elsewhere in the text – although, to be fair, some of the texts are also missing the first parts or pages (notably every text by Ibn ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir). One text by Shāfiʿ b. ʿAlī does contain a reference to an addressee on its title page as well as a reference to a part being offered separately to "the royal library" (*al-khizāna l-ʿāliyya l-mawlawiyya l-sulṭāniyya*), but these statements remain somewhat ambiguous, and the first was in all likelihood not a sultan.[49] In addition, some of the material in the texts – correspondence and other official documents – should also definitely be interpreted as emanating from sultanic policy, although Broadbridge's evaluation of diplomacy as an arena for claims of legitimacy does overstate the almost exclusive influence of rulers and ruling elites on the forms that diplomacy took, and does not fully take into account the central importance of chancery scribes on the specific forms and contents of these documents. As it was correspondence writing from which writers in

[48] Mansouri, "Le portrait du sultan al-Manṣūr Qalāwūn".
[49] Holt, "Succession in the Early Mamluk Sultanate", 148. *Faḍl*, 85. I will return to this more extensively in 7.1.2.

the *dīwān* derived their social pre-eminence, it is only logical that authors would not only communicate the ruler's image to the wider world, but also make their authorial mark by way of the display of stylistic mastery. In other words, such letters were as much a display of the author's claim to status as that of the sultan. It is no coincidence that much of this correspondence was included in our authors' texts, as I will argue that it showcased their own crucial role in the execution of the sultan's project of state formation. Furthermore, while the specific sultan's claims of authority through these letters became more or less irrelevant in later times, the letters themselves were constantly reused as rhetorical exempla in scribal manuals and letter collections. For example, it seems that the letters of Ibn ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir and al-Qāḍī l-Fāḍil were in later centuries remembered mostly for their eloquence and only in the second place as letters that expressed the claims to power of a specific sultan.[50]

Rather than seeing the writing of sultanic *sīra*, as well as of diplomacy, as a top down process, I argue that it is far more interesting to look at the relationship between sultan and chancery from a participative point of view. This type of interpretation of courtly literary production has been gaining ground in research on western pre-modern court cultures, and has also seen a number of successful applications by scholars of (late) Abbasid praise poetry.[51] A looser and multidirectional interpretation of processes of cultural production is thus more useful than a top-down view of sultanic instigation, and this is especially true in the context of the *sīra*'s. While the sultan and his immediate entourage must have been part of the wider intended audience of the texts, there is only little evidence that his (or their) influence on the larger textual constructions was fundamental. As I will argue in detail below, the conceptualisations of ideal rule found in these texts should not only be read as functioning as forms of legitimisation, but also as displays of rhetorical and literary prowess, as cultural capital applied in a negotiation of

[50] For Ibn ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir, see below. For al-Qāḍī l-Fāḍil: when Ibn ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir compiled a number of letters by al-Qāḍī l-Fāḍil in his *al-Durr al-naẓīm*, he stated in its very short introduction that "I have gathered in this book those letters of the loftiest al-Qāḍī al-Fāḍil ʿAbd al-Raḥīm b. ʿAlī al-Baysānī – may God have mercy upon him – that may benefit the beginner and be born in mind by the [one who has reached the] limit [of eloquent correspondence]". (see Arabic below) *Al-Durr an-naẓīm min tarassul ʿAbd al-Raḥīm,* ed. Aḥmad Aḥmad Badawī (Cairo: Maktaba nahḍat Miṣr, 1959), 8. No mention is made of Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn in this introduction, despite all letters being written in his service.

فقد جمعت في هذا الكتاب من رسائل القاضي الأجل الفاضل عبد الرحيم ابن علي البيساني، رحمه الله، ما ينتفع به المبتدىء * ويتذكر به المنتهى *

[51] Beatrice Gruendler, *Medieval Arabic Praise Poetry: Ibn al-Rūmī and the Patron's Redemption* (London: Routledge, 2003); Margaret Larkin, *Al-Mutanabbi: Voice of the ʿAbbasid Poetic Ideal* (London: One World, 2007); Jocelyn Sharlet, *Patronage and Poetry in the Islamic World: Social Mobility in the Medieval Middle East and Central Asia* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2011); Erez Naaman, *Literature and the Islamic Court: Cultural Life Under al-Ṣāḥib b. ʿAbbād* (London: Routledge, 2016). As Jeroen Duindam writes in his introduction to a volume on comparative research into court cultures: "recent studies on ritual as well as on patronage tend to stress the many-sidedness of political communication and to move away from the strict top-down view of state- or ruler-controlled instrumental 'use' of such practices" Jeroen Duindam, "Introduction", in *Royal Courts in Dynastic States and Empires: A Global Perspective*, eds. J. Duindam, T. Artan & M. Kunt (Leiden: Brill, 2011), 9.

social position in the courtly environment, in the household of the sultan or one of his agents, and especially in the literary field cultivated in the *dīwān al-inshāʾ*.

Conclusion

The preceding sections have engaged with various scholarly interpretations of the history of the "Mamluk" sultanate. While the general run of historical events found in the sources is relatively easy to reconstruct, things get a lot more complicated when we try to *understand* the workings of state and society in the period. To return to the anonymous, crude annalistic source quoted at the outset of the chapter, we can be quite sure that what it tells us is truthful, i.e. that certain sultans gained the throne in specific years and that they conquered certain places during their reigns. But to interpret the specific workings of state formation, the reasons *why* and *how* a sultan ascended the throne, is quite another matter and calls for a more discerning reading of the sources. I have summarised above some fruitful ways that have been suggested by earlier scholars to conceptualise these workings and in which I situate my broader socio-political evaluations. I have however also criticized another major line of interpretation, namely that of legitimisation, as too one-sided. Instead I argue for seeing the authors and sultans in a multifaceted relationship of patronage and less in one of top-down propagandistic assignment, with more attention to authorial agency and their relationship to practices of state formation — of which legitimisation is only one part. This broadens our lens of interpretation to include the entire process of textual inception, creation and reception in a participative framework. Here, historical truth and narrative are constantly negotiated between authors, textual traditions and the receptive aesthetics involved. These considerations will be crucial in Part Two of this dissertation, but before turning to analysis, more specific context is necessary and will be given in the following two chapters.

Chapter 2
Court, Chancery, and Careers: Defining the Field of Social Practice

سيعلم الجمعُ ممن ضمَّ مجلسنا بأنني خيرُ من تسعى به قدمُ
أنا الذي نظر الأعمى إلى أدبي وأسمعت كلماتي من به صممُ

All those whom our majlis *has gathered will come to know*
that I am better than he who strives for merit
I am the one whose adab the blind sees
and my words grant hearing to who is deaf to it[1]

These two famous lines of the great fourth / tenth century poet al-Mutanabbī (d. 354 / 965), whom we shall meet again as a major inspiration for Ibn ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir, are part of a longer panegyric to the Ḥamdanid ruler of Aleppo Sayf al-Dawla (d. 356 / 967). The lines introduce the traditional boasting section of the *qaṣīda* which serve to draw the focus of the text squarely onto al-Mutanabbī's linguistic prowess.[2] "All those whom our *majlis* has gathered" is traditionally understood as the ruler's court, a gathering of his supporters, officials, and literary companions in a setting where they would listen to newly written poetry honouring their leader. But who belonged to this court? And can

[1] Al-Mutanabbī, *Dīwān,* (Beirut: Dār ṣādir & Dār Bayrūt, 1964), 332 (full poem 331-334).
[2] These lines and/or (parts of) the rest of the poem from which they derive have been translated into English a number of times before, but I have chosen to translate them rather more literally. The best earlier translation is S.K. Jayyusi and C. Middleton (transl.), "Qasida 5", in *Qasida Poetry in Islamic Asia and Africa: Eulogy's Bounty, Meaning's Abundance. An Anthology,* eds. S. Sperl & C. Shackle (Leiden: Brill, 1996), 89. See also: R.A. Nicholson, *A Literary History of the Arabs* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1930), 307; A.M. Flood "Riding the She-Camel into the Desert: A Translation of Two Classical Arabic Poets" (Unpublished B.A. thesis, Swarthmore College, 2009), 10.

we transpose al-Mutanabbī's *majlis* to the courtly settings in which our authors performed their writings or did things change considerably in the centuries after the life of this famous poet? It will be argued in the pages below that this was indeed the case, and that there is little trace of the courtly *majlis* as a literary institution during the life period of our authors. At the same time, these earlier *majālis* had a paradigmatic importance that informed part of the vocabulary of how our authors spoke about court, and there were still several ways in which literary agents could participate in courtly environments. The following chapter will try to delineate some of the more salient features of these environments to adequately understand our authors' actions within them.

As noted in Chapter 1, the central integrative node of social practice in the Military Patronage State was the *bayt* or household, lead by an amir or by the sultan himself. "Court" in this period should be understood as fundamentally intertwined with its social practices. However, rather than reconstructing how such households worked in general, I will here sketch only the information necessary to understand how our authors fitted into such structures, building both on material from primary sources and secondary studies that have been undertaken before. It will be my goal to give all the necessary information to conceive of the role of a *kātib* in the *dīwān al-inshāʾ* as part of the sultan's household, and more broadly, as an agent within the state institution. Did it merely consist of his official duties in correspondence and official discourse, as a highly placed employee, or should we also see him as a Mutanabbī-like courtier developing his writings to satisfy and define courtly taste, as an encomiast writing literary epistles in a relation of patronage towards the ruler? Or should we more abstractly see him as an agent negotiating his own position in the sultan's household by his writings?

Matthieu Eychenne, who wrote an extensive study of household patronage relations which I will be referring to often below, defined a *kātib*'s role in the household of an amir as:

> une relation informelle, car non-sanctionnée d'un contrat, entre des personnes de status sociaux inégaux. Ce lien se fonde sur un échange de services relatifs au pouvoir respectif des patrons et des clients.[3]

What makes this definition useful as a starting point is that it does not define the relation between amir and *kātib* in exact terms, but rather sees it in the first place as a contingent social relation, in which informality and even personal intimacy are

[3] Eychenne, *Liens personnels, clientélisme et réseaux de pouvoir,* 63.

stressed. Rather than mere hierarchy, "ambiguous bonds" often existed between these socially disparate individuals.[4] Because of exactly this ambiguity, is is best to conceive of household politics as contextually bound. In the following, the two most important of these contexts — the entangled entities of court and chancery — for this study will be discussed, in addition to the various social relations established between its agents.

The following sections will discuss the various areas in which our authors and peers performed their social status. This will result in a thorough groundwork for the analysis of social practice in this dissertation, by way of delineation of the field of social practice, as well as the habitus active within that field. The sections will operate from a macro- to a micro-level, starting with a discussion of court – both as a theoretical and practical, performative locus – and then towards the more narrow institution of the chancery, to eventually look at the specific career patterns of our authors and a number of their peers within these contexts. Much more than in the previous chapter, these sections will build on the ways in which the *sīra* corpus itself offers clues for this analysis. As secondary research is abundant for the study of the chancery, but much less so for the definition of "court", my approach in studying these two institutions will differ slightly: my understanding of court will mostly be derived from the primary sources, while that of chancery is in large part inspired by secondary research and finetuned by referral to primary sources. I am fully aware that the primary texts often present idealised portrayals of these social contexts and that the descriptions do not always necessarily correspond to a supposed historical reality, and indeed, that these discourses in fact actively produced and reproduced particular understandings of that reality. Despite this remark, I will refer to these social contexts as institutions, but one must bear in mind that I am only referring to the textual logic in which they are institutions, and not to the supposed existence of neatly organised and strictly delineated bureaus. However, as all the other material used in my analysis also derives almost exclusively from the texts, it is fundamental to form an understanding of these textual representations of court, chancery, and the social practices described if we also want to understand other information contained within our texts that refers to these representations of institutions.

[4] Eychenne, *Liens personnels,* 72.

2.1 Court

2.1.1 Defining Court

Our texts do not provide a clear-cut equivalent to modern usage of the term court, but they do refer regularly to a number of spatial, social, and symbolic conceptualisations that scholars have traditionally rendered as "court". A definition of court in the late seventh / thirteenth and early eighth / fourteenth century should take into account all of these aspects to form an adequate understanding of how courtly life was conceived and ordered. There has of course been a great deal of scholarly theoretisation on the courtly phenomenon, especially in the wake of Norbert Elias' study of Louis XIV's relationship to his nobles at Versailles in *Die höfische Gesellschaft.*[5] In Islamic contexts there have been studies of court as well, but in the following section I will delineate the meanings of court predominantly as they appear in the sources under study instead of trying to align data from the sources with earlier conceptualisations.[6] My focus will by necessity be on the textual and thus discursive representations of court, as these are the limits of my core corpus.

Most fundamentally, in our sources courtly life seems to have revolved around the central node of the sultan's presence. In Arabic this is expressed by the root letters *ḥ-ḍ-r*, which are most commonly used in a verbal form in the context of agents' personal audiences with the ruler. Unlike other common verbs used in contexts of courtly rituals in relation to the sultan, such as *akrama* (to treat reverentially), *anʿama* (to bestow favours) and *aḥsana* (to act well towards someone, or to be conversant) which are intimately related to the specific etiquette of receiving and honouring guests, *ḥ-ḍ-r* has a wider signification beyond ritual: it denotes the sultan's personal presence as the embodiment of court. However, this presence is as it were transitive, for the subject of the verb *ḥ-ḍ-r* is usually not the ruler, but the guest(s) who arrive(s) in his presence, thus initiating the "courtliness". Similarly, sometimes authors note that guests arrived in front of the sultan by the term "*bayna yaday*" ("between the two hands of"), which is a common expression, but of course strongly emphasises the personal and physical nature of the encounter.[7] Court is as such in the first place a social phenomenon, a field of action generated in specific contexts where ruler, retinue, and guests came together

[5] For a recent overview of interpretations building on or going beyond Elias' conceptualisations of court, see: Jeroen Duindam, "Introduction", in *Royal Courts in Dynastic States and Empires*, 1-9.
[6] Albrecht Fuess & Jan-Peter Hartung (eds.), *Court Cultures in the Muslim World: Seventh to Nineteenth Centuries* (London: Routledge, 2011). Inspired by Bourdieu, Erez Naaman studied "the literary field of the court" in *Literature and the Islamic Court.*
[7] Arabe 1705, 22; *Tashrīf*, 103.

to perform certain rituals that had throughout earlier periods converged in this setting to form a normative lexicon of appropriate actions and expressions, a *habitus* of courtly practice – I will return to this below.[8]

Because of this inherently social character of "court", it becomes highly transferrable in terms of spatiality:[9] *ḥ-ḍ-r* is used in audiences irrespectively of its context in the citadels of Cairo, Damascus or elsewhere, in other buildings, such as when Qalāwūn received the Ayyubid prince of Hama and his retinue in his recently erected *qubba* (mausoleum),[10] or even in a military encampment.[11] The term is also used irrespective of the ruler: when Ibn ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir describes the experiences of three envoys sent by Qalāwūn to the Castilian court in Seville where they were not allowed to leave, an envoy of the Marinid sultan of Marrakesh Abū Yūsuf Yaʿqūb b. ʿAbd al-Ḥaqq (d. 685 / 1286) describes Qalāwūn's envoys' presence at king Alfonso X's (d. 1284) court with the verbal form *ḥaḍarū,* and Alfonso replies by using another form of the same verb (*yaḥḍur*).[12] To further add to the ambiguousness, there are also instances in which the term is used to denote enemies, such as the defeated rebels from Karak who are brought before sultan Qalāwūn to become beneficiaries of "his natural disposition to forgiveness and beneficence for every human being". In the same context, Ibn ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir even uses the verb to refer to the arrival of "good tidings" (*bishāra*) about the capture of the rebellious citadel of Karak.[13] Only a few pages later he uses the verb to denote the arrival of Qalāwūn himself in the city during the ceremonial opening of his grand complex in the city centre.[14]

This was thus a very flexible term that appeared in a great amount of ambiguously related contexts. To specifically denote the spatial context in which these audiences took place, authors usually employed more exact terms. They often do so by referring directly to the citadel (*qalʿa*), the seat of power in Cairo first built during the reign of Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn in the Muqaṭṭam hills, towering over the city as an effective symbol of the

[8] See the observations in: E. Naaman, *Literature and the Islamic Court*, 21-24.
[9] On the court being a "fixed institution", the rites of which were however performed in "many different locations", see the general observations in Duindam, *Prince, Pen, and Sword,* 548-549.
[10] *Tashrif*, 139-140.
[11] *Tashrif*, 91.
[12] *Tashrīf*, 112. Ibn ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir is in this part presumably paraphrasing a letter sent by these envoys when they returned to Tunis. The account also includes some information about the enthronement of Sancho IV in which the author makes much use of terminology typically found in courtly performances of the Egyptian sultans themselves, claiming among other things that Sancho was "crowned sultan (*tasalṭana*), and he rode out with the *ṭabalkhānāt*". *Tashrīf,* 113.
[13] *Tashrīf*, 123-124. Similarly, Ibn Shaddād reproduces Mongol direct speech in which a person being sent to Abaghā Khān is referred to by way of a similar form: "***aḥḍarū*** *maʿa-nā ilā l-Urdū bayna yaday Abaghā li-yafṣil bayna-nā wa bayna-kum*." *Tārīkh al-Malik al-Ẓāhir*, 153.
[14] *Tashrīf*, 126. Al-Qalqashandī has a lengthy discussion of various ways to write to non-Islamic rulers, in which *ḥaḍra* is an important element. *Ṣubḥ al-aʿshā fī ṣināʿat al-inshāʾ* (Cairo: Maṭbaʿat Dār al-kutub, 1922), vol. 6:165-170.

sultan's authority.[15] The citadel itself was sometimes used as a narrative signifier of authority as well, especially in contexts where the actual spatial context would be useful to make certain points. Ibn ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir for example refers at several points to "[the sultan's] citadel" (*qalʿatu-hu*),[16] to "the abode of his kingship" (*mustaqarr mulki-hi*),[17] or to the more abstractly formulated "his resting place in the secure fortified place" (*qāmat-hu fī ḥirzi l-salāmati*).[18] Several decades later, his grandson ʿAlāʾ al-Dīn b. ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir (d. 717 / 1317) even wrote about the Cairo citadel (*qalʿatu Miṣra*) as "God's shelter on His earth" (*kināatu l-Lāhi fī arḍi-hi*).[19]

A more commonly used term by which our authors refer to something that can be identified as "court" is the compound construction of *al-abwāb,* "the gates", with a variety of specifiers such as *al-sharīfa* ("revered"), *al-ʿālīya* ("exalted"), *al-sulṭānīya* ("sultanic"), or more directly, *mawlā-nā al-sulṭān* ("of our lord the sultan"), and sometimes simply *abwābu-hu* ("his gates"). Shāfiʿ at one point uses the term *al-abwābu l-saʿīdiyya* to specifically refer to the sultanate of al-Saʿīd Bereke during his struggles with Qalāwūn.[20] While the term is found most often in connection with the sultanates of Qalāwūn, al-Ashraf Khalīl, and al-Nāṣir Muḥammad, it also appears in Ibn ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir's *sīra* of Baybars, albeit less commonly.[21] It was also often used for the vizierate of Bahāʾ l-Dīn b. Ḥinnā,[22] and the fourteenth-century Christian *kātib* Ibn al-Ṣuqāʿī (d. 726 / 1325-1326), a contemporary of Shāfiʿ, refers to a certain *kātib* known as Shihāb al-Ḥanafī[23] as a "*kātib* at the gate [of the highly placed amir Badr al-Dīn Baylīk al-Jāshnikīr al-Ḥalabī al-Ẓāhirī] in the *dawla* of al-Ẓāhir [Baybars]".[24] This reminds one of the lexically similar Ottoman *bāb-i ʿālī,* commonly rendered as "Sublime Porte", which referred both to the Ottoman function or ministerial department of Grand Vizier itself, as to his "personal dwelling".[25]

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[15] On the architectural features of the Citadel and the rituals performed there, see: D. Behrens-Abouseif, "The Citadel of Cairo: Stage for Mamluk Ceremonial", *Annales Islamologiques* 24 (1988), 25-79; N. Rabat, *The Citadel of Cairo: A New Interpretation of Royal Mamluk Architecture* (Leiden: Brill, 1995).
[16] *Alṭāf,* 27. See also Arabe 1705, 72r.
[17] *Tashrīf,* 115, 139.
[18] *Tashrīf*, 129.
[19] ʿAlāʾ al-Dīn b. ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir, "Al-rawḍ al-zāhir fī ghazwat al-Malik al-Nāṣir", quoted in al-Nuwayrī, *Nihāyat al-arab fī funūn al-adab,* 32:22.
[20] *Faḍl,* 42.
[21] *Rawḍ,* 87.
[22] *Rawḍ*, 454. This particular part is in fact reproduced from al-Qalqashandī, *Ṣubḥ,* 14:139 to make up for a lacuna of several pages in the manuscript, but is very closely related to what must have been present in the missing pages; I will return to this specific part in more detail below in 6.2.1.2. For another instance, see: Ibn Shaddād, *Tārīkh al-Malik al-Ẓāhir,* 81.
[23] This is not the famous *kātib* Shihāb al-Dīn Maḥmūd about whom I will have more to say below.
[24] Ibn al-Ṣuqāʿī, *Tālī kitāb wafayāt al-aʿyān,* ed. J. Sublet (Damascus: Presses de l'IFPO, 1973), 31. When this amir died of lepra, the *kātib* started working for another amir, which is again rendered via a similar expression: "*lazima Shihāb al-Dīn bāb Badr al-Dīn al-Masʿūdī*".
[25] J. Deny, "Bāb-i ʿĀlī", *EI2.*

When used in sultanic contexts — which, it must be stressed, is the most common occurence in our sources — the *abwāb* compound is used relatively interchangeably with the forms of *ḥ-ḍ-r* mentioned above. Indeed, both terms commonly occur in the very same context.[26] But the compound has the advantage that it can also be used outside of the context of an audience. Where "presence" is usually invoked in contexts where persons came to the sultan, *abwāb* is sometimes also used in the reverse direction, i.e. when people are sent out by the sultan,[27] or when letters or news arrives at court.[28]

Syrinx Von Hees has argued that the use of the term "*bāb*" foremost denotes the spatial separation essential to medieval Islamic rulership, "the border offering controlled access to the ruler".[29] It is indeed true that behind these (metaphorical) gates there existed quite elaborate rituals of court audience. These are sometimes described in some detail, so we can form an impression about how the attendants would hold themselves in the sultan's presence. Much of this has been described in earlier research, so in the following section I will limit myself to discuss relevant insights from that earlier research and add some data taken specifically from the corpus to formulate some ideas about how exactly our authors would have fit into these rituals.[30]

2.1.2 Performing Court: Ritual, Ceremony, and the Courtly Habitus

Considering the fact that courtliness was in the first place defined by the sultan's *presence*, rituals were performed in various contexts. Although the Citadel was an imposing embodiment of the sultan's authority and furnished a number of the foremost contexts for ritualised audiences, it was not the only place in which courtliness was performed. The most imposing context in the Citadel was the sultan's *qubba* or *iwān,* commonly rendered in English as audience hall or throne hall. Interestingly, this specific structure on the southern part of the Citadel was rebuilt several times during the period under study by the same sultans whose lives are described by our authors. Baybars, Qalāwūn, and al-Nāṣir Muḥammad all rebuilt the hall, and al-Ashraf Khalīl possibly did so as well.[31] As these places "conveyed an image of royal grandeur

[26] *Tashrīf*, 68, 89, 92; *Alṭāf*, 45, 51; Arabe 1705, 35r, 40v, 45r, 105v.
[27] *Tashrif*, 30; Arabe 1705, 59v,
[28] Arabe 1705, 67r.
[29] S. Von Hees, "The Guidance for Kingdoms: Function of a 'Mirror for Princes' at Court and its Representation of a Court", in *Court Cultures in the Muslim World*, 375.
[30] Karl Stowasser, "Manners and Customs at the Mamluk Court", *Muqarnas* 2 (1984), 13-20. See also the studies mentioned above on the Citadel.
[31] N. Rabbat, "Mamluk Throne Halls: *Qubba* or *Iwān*?", *Ars Orientalis* 23 (1993), 201.

appropriate for the ceremonies they were built for", the strong association with ceremonial and the sultan's outward image is not surprising.[32]

Although our authors only rarely elaborate on the spatial setting,[33] they do relatively often talk about the rituals of audiences and are especially keen to note the various types of gifts that were exchanged in such contexts. Ibn ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir's account of an audience (*ḥuḍūr*) of Yemeni messengers to Qalāwūn's court (*abwābu mawlā-nā al-sulṭāni*) in 684 / 1285, written mostly in *sajʿ*, may serve as a typical example. Although it is not explicitly stated where the ceremony took place, the *īwān* is a likely location:

> ولما كان يوم السبت سلخ شوال جلس مولانا السلطان للإجتماع بالرسل المذكورين فحضروا بعد أن شرّفوا بخلع القدوم وإنعامه. و تجمّل الأمراء كلهم والمماليك السلطانية بحسن الملبوس الذي تهبت له النجوم * واستقرّ كل أحد بمقامه المعلوم * وأحضرت التقادم و الهدايا المتنوّعة من تحف الهند والسند واليمن وكل غريبة * وكل عجيبة. * وفي جملة التقادم فيل وكرك عظيم وخيول نجدية أصايل ودرر وأغنام. فشاهد مولانا السلطان من هذه الهدايا كل غريب * وشاهدوا من مولانا السلطان ومن أمرائه وحواشيه كل حَسَن والترتيب * وأخذت كبتهم وقرأت بعد ذلك.
>
> When it was Saturday at the end of the month of Shawwāl the sultan sat (*jalasa*) to meet with the aforementioned messengers, so they came into his presence (*ḥaḍarū*) after they they had been honoured with robes of arrival (*shurrīfū bi-khilaʿ al-qudūm*) and with his benefaction (*inʿām*). All the amirs and the sultan's *mamlūks* were adorned with the loveliness of clothing such as amazed the stars, and everyone settled in his well-defined place (*bi-maqāmi-hi l-maʿlūm*). Then the diverse offerings and gifts of Indian, Sindhi and Yemeni works of art (*tuḥaf*) were procured, all of them strange and wonderful. Among all of these gifts were an elephant and a great rhinoceros, horses of Najdī origin as well as pearls and sheep. Our lord the sultan inspected of all these gifts every remarkable thing, while [the messengers] all witnessed from our lord the sultan, from his amirs and from his retinue the excellence of [proper] arrangement. Afterwards their letters were received and read.[34]

Although the remainder of this particular account is actually fairly critical of the contents of the Yemeni messages, and portrays Qalāwūn reprimanding the Yemeni Rasulids for not doing enough against the Mongols,[35] its description of the ritual of

[32] Idem, 208.
[33] For an example of court ritual in the *īwān* when al-Saʿīd Bereke's cosultanship was renewed, see: *Rawḍ,* 338.
[34] *Tashrīf*, 117.
[35] Doris Behrens-Abouseif, *Practicing Diplomacy in the Mamluk Sultanate: Gifts and Material Culture in the Medieval Islamic World* (London-New York: I.B. Tauris, 2016), 39. See also passim for a synthesis of information on gift-giving as an integral part of diplomacy taken from a wide array of historical sources.

courtly audience is quite suggestive of the social relations established during such ceremonies. Especially the statement that everyone in the audience hall "settled in his well-defined place" underlines the high degree of hierarchy we also know from many other, sometimes more elaborate accounts. That short comment explicitly adds to our knowledge of such gatherings the factor that these things were well-known or well-defined (*maʿlūm*) — a word Ibn ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir here in facts uses as a rhyming word for *nujūm* and *qudūm* in the preceding sentences — and indicates a courtly habitus that all agents in that context strictly adhered to.

Elaborate ritual was not only crucial to audiences behind the "gates" of the Citadel, it was also part and parcel of every public appearance of the sultan. For example, a few months after the earlier quoted visit of the Yemeni messengers, Ibn ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir provides a detailed account of the ritualised inauguration of Qalāwūn's Manṣūriyya complex, which consisted of a *madrasa*, a *bīmāristān* (hospital) and a mausoleum for himself. Many robes of honour were dealt out to anyone from *qāḍī*'s to craftsmen (*ṣunnāʿ*), and during the sultan's procession from the northern Bāb al-Naṣr to his complex further south in the middle of the city, the "people" (*al-nās*) are said to have been "arranged according to their ranks" (*ḥaḍara mawlā-nā al-sulṭān min jihat Bāb al-Naṣr wa-l-nās qad tarattabū fī amākini-him*).[36] Once the sultan and others had entered the madrasa they sat at large banquets (*asmiṭa,* literally "eating cloths") where all ate in the sultan's presence (*bayna yaday-hi*).[37] The sharing of food and drink seated at eating cloths was an important part of participating in the sultan's presence. Correctly presiding over such a ceremony was even seen as a marker of fitness to rule, as can be gleaned from an account by Shāfiʿ in his *sīra* of al-Nāṣir Muḥammad. After the latter left Cairo to perform the *ḥajj* in 709 / 1309 — in fact a ruse for his defection to Karak from whence he would abdicate — he had provided for his harem to follow him — also a ruse to evacuate his harem from the capital. Shāfiʿ writes:

> و حين خرج الركب من الديار المصرية خرج ولده المشار اليه وصحبته الأدر المصونة وخيموا ببركة الجب - وهي بركة الحجاج - وخرجت أدر الأمرا في خدمتهم للوداع وبكر نائب السلطنة وأستاددارها الأميران المذكوران وصحبتهم الأمرا لوداع السلطان الملك] المنصور علاء الدين علي؟ [ولده فمد لهم سماطًا متنوّعًا * وجلس على رأس السماط كعادة أبيه - اعزّ الله سلطانهما - وهو في دست أبيه متودّعا

[36] *Tashrīf*, 126. On the typical itinerary of such processions, see Willem Flinterman, "The Cult of Qalāwūn: *Waqf*, Commemoration, and Dynasty in early Mamluk Cairo, ca. 1280-1340" (Unpublished PhD thesis, Universiteit Amsterdam, 2017), 117; N. Rabbat, "Staging the City: Or How Mamluk Architecture Coopted the Streets of Cairo", *Ulrich Haarmann Memorial Lecture,* 9 (2014)

[37] *Tashrīf*, 127.

مودعا * فلما قضوا الخدمة من الأكل قبلوا الأرض بين يديه * وعادوا بعد أن أبدوا ما يجب من التعظيم لديه *

> When the caravan left the Egyptian lands the aforementioned son [presumably al-Manṣūr ʿAlī] also left accompanied by the Harem women camping next to Birkat al-Jabb — that is, The Pond of the Pilgrims — and the women of the amirs in their service left to make their farewells.[38] The sultanate's viceroy and *ustāddār*, the two aforementioned amirs [Salār and Baybars al-Jāshnikīr] and their accompanying amirs woke up early to say farewell to the sultan al-Malik [al-Manṣūr] his son, and he laid down for them a varied meal. He sat at the head of the food cloth *according to the habit of his father* — may God strengthen the power of both of them — as he was left in the place of honour of his father as the person who sees off [those left behind]. And when they finished the session as far as the food was concerned [the amirs] *kissed the ground in front of him*, and they returned after they had expressed the necessary salutations towards him.[39]

The ritualised and scripted nature of interaction with the ruler, even by the two most highly placed amirs in the sultanate — Baybars and Salār effectively directed the affairs of the sultanate during al-Nāṣir's second reign — is again very clear here. What is more, these interactions were regulated according to a strongly ingrained habitus: the very young son of al-Nāṣir[40] is said to have behaved "according to the habit of his father" (*ka-ʿādat abī-hi*) and the concluding actions are described as "what is necessary" (*mā yajibu*). The anecdote thus shows al-Nāṣir's son as a worthy heir of the sultanate, who not only performed what was necessary but was also able to command the respect for a sultan from those who serve him: the courtly habitus was as such, at least as far as the textual presentation goes, a cultural script in which all were expected to behave according to clearly defined, though perhaps not explicitly spelled out norms. Similar

[38] Reading *ādur* instead of *adur.* The first is a plural form of *dār* which was often used to denote noble wives. Another option would be to read *adurr* as an unattested plural form of *durra. Al-durra al-maṣūna* is still a common way to describe chaste, virtuous women. For both forms (though with *durra* only in the singular) cfr. Aḥmad ʿAbd ar-Rāziq, "La femme au temps des mamlouks en Egypte" (Unpublished PhD thesis, Université De Paris-I (Sorbonne), 1972), 99-101.

[39] Arabe 1705, 75r-75v. My italics.

[40] I presume this son must have been al-Malik al-Manṣur ʿAlī (d. 710 / 1310), who was only five or six years old at the time, based on Frédéric Bauden's "Qalawunid Pedigree" in: http://mamluk.uchicago.edu/qalawunids/qalawunid-pedigree.pdf. However, in the manuscript his name is consistently blotted out (three mentions on 75r, 75v, and 76r), perhaps because he died shortly after the events depicted in this account. This would suggest that this part was written before 709 / 1310, but the manuscript only finished later. The much later historian Ibn Ḥajar al-ʿAsqalānī notes that this son came to al-Nāṣir Muḥammad from Karak when the latter returned to Cairo (which would mean that the son did indeed join his father before the sultan's re-ascension), and was loved by his father because he was his only child at that point. He died while his father was hunting. *al-Durar al-kāmina fī aʿyān al-miʾa al-thāmina* (Beirut: Dār al-jīl, 1993), 3:115 (nr. 262).

representations of courtly behaviour also regularly appear in the context of hunting trips, where the sultan would hold eating assemblies and hand out robes of honour. These were as such presented as instances in which the rituals of power distribution were symbolically performed.[41]

Another context in which the sultan's public image was performed were the regular sessions of dealing out justice in the *dār al-ʿadl*, or "court of justice", where *maẓālim* or "grievances" cases were heard. Our sultans inherited this tradition from earlier rulers — Nūr al-Dīn Zengi (d. 569 / 1174) initiated the practice of doing so in a *dār al-ʿadl* — but extensively used it as a means to establish themselves as protectors of justice, and as a locale in which they received foreign ambassadors and collected the *jizya* tax. Jonathan Berkey has concluded that it was "an important architectural manifestation of the sultan's authority".[42] Many researchers have similarly seen this institution foremost as a place for sultanic legitimisation and highlighted the tension between the sultan's justice, or *siyāsa,* and traditional Islamic law, or *sharīʿa.* This evaluation has more recently been criticised by Yossef Rapoport who drew attention to the period's important legal innovations in which the *maẓālim* courts played an active role as mediators between the tenets of *sharīʿa* and the realities of social practice, in which their role as such was not so much legitimatory but socially necessary.[43]

The *dār al-ʿadl* theoretically functioned as a means of making the sultan accessible to the public, but the description of these sessions still suggest a high degree of ritual and scripted behaviour. Shāfiʿ for example refers to a session in the *dār al-ʿadl* under Baybars to go "as usual" ("*ʿalā l-ʿāda*"),[44] which may seem unimportant, but in fact suggests – as above in the fragment about courtly ceremonial quoted from Ibn ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir - that these sessions were held according to a habitus implicitly regulating social practice. Similarly, in a memorandum (*tadhkira*) written by Shāfiʿ's cousin Fatḥ al-Dīn b. ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir, but only preserved in a version summarized by Shāfiʿ, it is prescribed that:

> ودار العدل يتقدم إلى نوّابها بملازمتها في الأيام المعلومات ويحضرها من كانت عادته بالحضور فيها مدّة الغيبة في البيكار ليفصلوا بين شكايات العالم ويحسموا مادّة الشكاوى ويقطعوا المظالم
>
> [As for] the *dār al-ʿadl* [the prince, that is Qalāwūn's heir at the time, al-Ṣāliḥ ʿAlī] calls on the representatives associated to [this institution] (*nuwwāba-ha bi-*

[41] *Rawḍ,* 221, 264-265; *Ḥusn al-manāqib,* 153-154; *Tashrīf al-ayyām,* 3, 53: *al-Alṭāf al-khafiyya,* 23-29; Arabe 1705, 23v-24v, 62v-63v.
[42] J.P. Berkey, *The Formation of Islam: Religion and Society in the Near East, 600-1800* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 222.
[43] Y. Rapoport, "Royal Justice and Religious Law: *Siyāsah* and Shariʿah Under the Mamluks", *MSR* 16 (2012), 71-76.
[44] *Ḥusn*, 143.

> *mulāzamati-hā*) in the first ten days of the month Dhū l-Ḥijja (*al-ayyām al-maʿlūmāt*), and [makes sure] that he who is usually present in its [sessions] is present during the time of the [sultan's] absence [because of his partaking] in battle, and that [the representatives] may make decisions concerning the grievances of the world and settle the stipulation of the complaints, and cut off injustices.[45]

Here too, a "usual" way of doing things in this context is posited, which must be safeguarded despite the sultan's absence: the prince who acts as regent in Egypt needs to make sure that the legal representatives usually present at such sessions keep doing their jobs while the prince takes the sultan's place. More abstractly, it suggests that the proper rituals of power need to be performed continuously for them to be valid.

Not only were the rituals of power performed in this context, they were also to some degree negotiated there. Shāfiʿ includes an interesting little anecdote in his *sīra* of Baybars — it is one of several anecdotes not mentioned by Ibn ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir in his original *sīra* — about the sultan's behaviour in this context:

> وحضر للطعام فأكل السلطان والأمراء والتفت للأمراء وقال: نحن بدار عدل وهذا الطعام الحاضر لكل فيه حق وقد إنفردنا به فما تقول في ذلك يا قاضي القضاة تاج الدين؟ فقال: بك تستخلص الحقوق واستحسن من السلطان هذا الكيس وهذه المداعبة.

> [The sultan] arrived to eat,[46] and the sultan and the amirs ate. Then [the sultan] turned to amirs, and said: 'we are in a *dār al-ʿadl*, and this present food is for everyone who has a right to it, and we have taken it for ourselves individually. So what do you say to that, chief judge Tāj al-Dīn [b. Bint al-Aʿazz]?' [The latter] replied: 'Rights derive from you and such cleverness and pleasantry from the sultan is commendable'.[47]

While the meaning of the anecdote seems rather unclear at first sight — as Shāfiʿ's anecdotes often tend to be — it is actually quite revealing as to the power relations playing in the *dār al-ʿadl*. Sharing food with his courtiers is a crucial part of sultanic behaviour (see also Shāfiʿ's anecdote about al-Nāṣir's son above), but the sultan as it were criticises the fact that they have done so "individually" (*infaradnā bi-hi*). In the

[45] *Faḍl,* 126. I will discuss the textual function and this and the two other *tadhkira*'s recorded in this section in 6.2.3.
[46] ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz al-Khuwayṭir, the editor of the text, suggests that this might be a misspelling for "*ḥadara al-ṭaʿām*" (the food arrived).
[47] Shāfiʿ, *Ḥusn*, 143-144. Al-Khuwayṭir split up the last sentence (written continuously in the manuscript, BnF Arabe 1707, 45r), implying that Tāj al-Dīn only replied "rights derive from you" and that the rest of the sentence was said by the sultan. I think this would make very little sense in the context of the anecdote.

context of the *dār al-ʿadl*, where all could come to the sultan to present their grievances, this courtly behaviour as it were effectively seals off the *dār al-ʿadl* again from the general population. There is even more, for the sultan perhaps somewhat teasingly asks the opinion of the chief *qāḍī* Tāj al-Dīn b. Bint al-Aʿazz, an important and powerful agent with whom Baybars in fact had to contend. It has been argued that Baybars' famous creation of four chief judgeships, one for each *madhhab* (law school, pl. *madhāhib*), was a way of breaking the legal power of Ibn Bint al-Aʿazz who had been unwilling to accept rulings from judges who belonged to another *madhhab* than his own.[48] With the knowledge of this power struggle in our minds, this specific anecdote in the *dār al-ʿadl* can be read as Baybars asserting his supreme legal authority when it came to *maẓālim*. The judge is portrayed as going along with Baybars' decision, minor as it may be, but in doing so symbolically acknowledging the sultan's "secular" jurisdiction. The specific words used by the *qāḍī* are quite suggestive as well, for they seem to belong partly in the context of an informal gathering, where a pleasant atmosphere was cultivated, yet it also clearly adheres to the respectful tone required of a courtier. The sultan is called "clever" and "pleasant", but these comments are ultimately submissive, for they acknowledge the sultan's prerogative to decide what was lawful or not.

This brings us to a last courtly context that deserves our attention: in earlier periods, literary salons (*majlis,* pl. *majālis,* also *mujālasa*, pl. *mujālasāt*) had been a major arena of courtly behavior, and indeed, we have started out our discussion in this chapter with a classic quote that addresses such a context. Courtly *majālis* have been studied in quite some detail by Erez Naaman for the Buyid vizier and literary patron al-Ṣāḥib b. ʿAbbād (d. 385 / 995), whose salons provided the stage for a great number of prominent littérateurs of the period, and which we know not only from the poems and prose texts performed, but also from a great deal of anecdotes.[49] By contrast, we know fairly little about such practices in the later Middle Ages. Some sultans seem to have held such salons, the most famous of them being Qānisawḥ al-Ghawrī (r. 906-922/ 1501-1516), but we do not have much data of that kind for the sultans about whom the *sīra*'s were written.[50] We also know that a very large part of the court library of al-Ashraf Mūsā (d. 635 / 1237) consisted of poetry and other literary volumes, from which we may assume

[48] Sherman A. Jackson, "The Primacy of Domestic Politics: Ibn Bint al-Aʿazz and the Establishment of Four Chief Judgeships in Mamlûk Egypt", *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, 115/1 (1995), 52-65.
[49] E. Naaman, *Literate and the Islamic Court*, esp. 17-47.
[50] ʿIzz al-Dīn b. Shaddād does refer to *majālis* held by the slightly earlier Anatolian Seljuq ruler ʿAlāʾ al-Dīn Kayqubādh (d. 1237) in which a certain Muhadhdhab al-Dīn ʿAlī distinguished himself in Arabic linguistics (*ʿilm al-ʿArabiyya*), *Tārīkh al-Malik al-Ẓāhir,* 185. In an obituary for the poet Ṣafī l-Dīn al-Bazāʿī he also refers to a particular poem being improvised in a *majlis.* Idem, 89. Christian Mauder suggests that the *majālis* of al-Ghawrī were likely symbolic appropriations of the literary dynamics of famed Abbasid *majālis.* Personal communication.

that he promoted or at least welcomed the production of poetry.[51] Contemporarily to Shāfiʿ b. ʿAlī, the Ayyubid rulers of Hama, al-Malik al-Muʾayyad Abū l-Fidāʾ (d. 732 / 1331), a notable historian and geographer himself, and his son al-Malik al-Afḍal (d. 742 / 1342) were great patrons of literature and facilitated an atmosphere of creative expression at their court in Hama.[52] But these are famous examples perhaps mostly because they are rather atypical, or in the case of al-Ashraf Mūsā, because of the rare survival of a catalogue of a mausoleum library made up in large part of the books from his personal royal library which enables us to finetune the image given of him by contemporary and later historians. In the *sīra*'s no mention is made of *majālis* and royal libraries are not discussed in any detail, although rewards for poets who composed appropriate odes for certain occasions are sometimes noted.[53] At the same time, entertainment and poetry are sometimes derided and used as a topos concomitant to the portrayal of incompetence.[54] Apparently, while the writing, performance and rewarding of appropriate praise poetry was accepted as integral to courtly behaviour, the more frivolous singing and poetry associated with such courtly *majālis* was seen in a very negative light. Yet, our texts abound with verses lauding the sultan's achievements. More often than not, these were (probably) written by our authors themselves.[55] This does suggest that praise poetry still held a position of some importance at court, or at least that various authors considered it fitting to present such practices as happening within broadly defined courtly settings in their texts. The fact that many of these poems were written by persons working in the chancery corroborates Bauer's assessment of the chancery's dominance in the literary field of the period. Let us now turn to this institution.

[51] Hirschler, *Medieval Damascus: Plurality and Diversity in an Arabic Library*, 106. According to Hirschler's simplest table of "external thematic categories", 32% of the library's contents was devoted to poetry, 16,5% to general *adab* works. The following pages develop the "profile" of the library in much more detail. Literature broadly defined remains by far the most dominant category.

[52] Bauer, "The Dawādār's Hunting Party: a Mamluk *Muzdawija Ṭardiyya*, probably by Shihāb al-Dīn ibn Faḍl Allāh", in *O Ye Gentlemen: Arabic Studies on Science and Literary Culture in Honour of Remke Kruk,* ed. A. Vrolijk & J.P. Hogendijk (Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2007), 295.

[53] *Rawḍ*, 185.

[54] *Rawḍ*, 62, 77, 425, 466; *Faḍl*, 39.

[55] Many included poems are not explicitly ascribed to a poet and can not be identified by their appearance in other works. I am assuming that the majority of these were self-written, as they are often directly related to the events described in the prose sections. See 6.2.2. for a tabulated quantitative overview of poetry per text.

2.2 Chancery

Our authors participated in the courtly environment foremost as members of what is conventionally referred to as the "chancery". Some of the various ways in which this institution (although it would be more accurate to speak of a conglomerate of related institutions) participated in courtly contexts have been mentioned above, but I will now turn to it in more detail. Unlike the relative elusiveness of the courtly institution itself, we are fairly well informed about the workings of the chancery because of a number of scribal manuals that amply detail its various practices and functions. The most prominent author of such a work is the late eighth / fourteenth century mid-ranking *kātib* Shihāb al-Dīn al-Qalqashandī (821 / 1418), who wrote an encyclopedic multi-volume work entitled *Ṣubḥ al-aʿshā fī ṣināʿat al-inshāʾ* ("The dawn of the blind: on the art of *inshāʾ*"), which has been extensively studied. *Ṣubḥ al-aʿshā* deals with all the types of knowledge deemed appropriate for an aspiring *kātib* to study, and is especially concerned with discussing and quoting at considerable length the various types of texts a *kātib* should be able to write. As such, many letters and documents by earlier masters were reproduced to illustrate the various forms such texts could take, but it also entailed a great amount of historical information on the roles and make-ups of the chancery in earlier times. Building on a long tradition of works devoted to the art of writing (*kitāba*) and the proper edification necessary to write the type of prose demanded of the occupation, al-Qalqashandī collected a massive amount of textual material, from early Islamic to contemporary times, which he brought together in a well-ordered synthesis. Similar large-scale synthetic works, such as al-Nuwayrī's *Nihāyat al-arab fī funūn al-adab,* and Shihāb al-Dīn b. Faḍl Allāh al-ʿUmarī's *Masālik al-abṣār fī mamālik al-amṣār,* the latter of which was an important acknowledged source for al-Qalqashandī, further add to our understanding of the workings of the chancery, as do a number of works on *inshāʾ* from earlier periods, such as *Ḥusn al-tawassul fī ṣināʿat al-tarassul,* written by our authors' contemporary Shihāb al-Dīn Maḥmūd al-Ḥalabī (about whom, see much more below).[56] Extensive studies of much of this literature have been undertaken before, and will form the basis of my discussion below.[57]

While the chancery entailed a variety of *dīwān*s, or "bureaus", Ibn ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir and Shāfiʿ b. ʿAlī were both active as *kuttāb* in its most prestigious bureau: the *dīwān al-inshāʾ,* usually rendered as "bureau of composition", which dealt mostly with high profile

[56] Elias Muhanna, "Why was the fourteenth century a century of Arabic encyclopaedism?", in *Encyclopaedism from Antiquity to the Renaissance*, eds. Jason König & Greg Woolf (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 343-356.
[57] For a general overview, see M.L.M. van Berkel, "Archives and Chanceries: pre-1500, in Arabic", *EI3.*

correspondence and public discourse in documents such as diploma's of investiture (*taqlīd*, pl. *taqālīd*) and contracts (*ʿahd*, pl. *ʿuhūd*). Leading this bureau traditionally also entailed the responsibility of advising the sultan in political decisions. This was especially pronounced under Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn, two of whose closest advisors, al-Qāḍī l-Fāḍil and ʿImād al-Dīn al-Iṣfahānī, served him in the first place as *kuttāb* — al-Fāḍil had in fact started working in the Fatimid chancery before eventually being promoted to vizier (*wazīr*). It seems to have been much less the case for our authors, who as far as we can tell did not enjoy similarly close or intimate relations to the sultan. The centrality of advice to the function of *kātib* thus depended more on the specific personality of the ruler and that of his would-be advisors than on an established tradition.

As the advisory function was highly contingent, the primary point of reference for a *kātib* must thus remain his writing itself. Throughout the preceding centuries, a distinctive writing style, simply called *inshāʾ,* had developed in the chancery. The fact that both the style and the institution were denoted by the same term shows how intimately connected the practice of writing official documents and the specific style of writing applied in doing so were. This style is deeply marked by sustained use of the ancient stylistic of *sajʿ*, a term usually rendered as rhymed prose but perhaps better called "rhyming cadenced prose" as Muhsin al-Musawi at one point does.[58] Characterised by intricate but balanced sentences, *inshāʾ* writings are also replete with rhetorical stylistics, such as wordplay, rare expressions, double entendres, and abundant quotations from or allusions to hallmarks of the Arabic textual tradition, especially the Qurʾān. *Inshāʾ* is etymologically derived from a root meaning of "construction" or "creation", and thus conceives of this type of writing as a creative act undertaken by the master of the form who looks for the right balance between emulation and innovation, who has memorised the vast achievements of Arabic literature and quotes it profusely, and is at the same time pushing its limits forward by adding subtle new turns of phrase. The act of writing *inshāʾ* in the context of correspondence writing itself is known as *tarassul*, which can be translated as epistolography and is a derived verbal form from the root letters *r-s-l,* from which the words for letter or treatise (*risāla,* pl. *rasāʾil*) and messenger (*rasūl*, pl. *rusul*) are also derived. The word for book, *kitāb* (pl. *kutub*), was also often used as a synonym for *risāla,* and this is again related to the form *kātib* or "scribe", and another word for correspondence writing itself, *kitāba.*

[58] M. Al-Musawi, "Pre-Modern Belletristic Prose" in *Arabic Literature in the Post-Classical Period,* eds. R. Allen and D.S. Richards (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 106. D.J. Stewart suggests "accent poetry" as a more accurate translation, as *sajʿ* does not only consist of end rhyme, but also of rhythm and *muwāzana* ("repetition of a set morphological (and necessarily syllabic or quantitative) pattern in the colon-final word or final foot"). "Rhymed Prose", *EQ,* 4:476. However, this rendering risks obscuring the specific formal division of prose and poetry made explicitly by most contemporary authors.

We know that the *dīwān al-inshāʾ* consisted of several persons who were organised in ranks. Above this hierarchy itself, there were also a number of courtly agents who directed the *dīwān* and were very close advisors of the sultan: the most prominent of these were the *wazīr* (commonly rendered as "vizier"), and the *dawādār* ("bearer of the royal inkwell"), both of which were flexible functions but in the period under study with very wide ranging powers. While chancery practices of the period clearly show a great deal of continuity to earlier practices under the Fatimids and Ayyubids, the importance of these agents who came predominantly from military elite backgrounds, was a Mamluk innovation. Maaike van Berkel has argued that this shows "a growing influence of the sword over the pen".[59] The actual *kuttāb* were lead by a *ṣāḥib dīwān al-inshā'* ("master of the composition bureau"). Various sources tell us that this function was transformed into that of *kātib al-sirr* ("confidential secretary") during the reign of al-Manṣūr Qalāwūn, although it seems that both terms continued to be used interchangeably for a while or were ambiguous even to later authors. Most sources tell us that the first person to hold the title of *kātib al-sirr* was Fatḥ al-Dīn b. ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir, who took over his father's leading role in the *dīwān al-inshāʾ* when he became too old to actively lead the bureau – more information on him will be given below.[60] When al-Nāṣir Muḥammad later abolished the post of *wazīr* itself, the *kātib al-sirr* was assigned a number of his duties and was significantly boosted in importance.[61]

Below the direct leadership of the *dīwān al-inshaʾ*, a number of *kuttāb* worked in two functions: *kuttāb al-dast* ("scribes of the bench")[62] and *kuttāb al-darj* ("scribes of the scroll"). While both functions entailed the writing down of chancery documents overseen or commissioned by the *ṣāḥib* and later the *kātib al-sirr,* they did so in two different contexts. Al-Qalqashandī tells us that the role of the *kuttāb al-dast* was that of intermediaries between the populace and the sultan whom they petitioned in the

[59] M. van Berkel, "The People of the Pen", 402. It should be noted that the function of vizier was not an innovation and that it was abolished by al-Nāṣir Muḥammad. The specific responsibilities of these agents were furthermore quite changeable over time.

[60] The anecdote usually given as triggering Qalāwūn's rationale for instating a *kātib al-sirr* involves Ibn ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir miswriting an appointment given to him by the *dawādār*, so that it was incomprehensible. Baybars then complained to Ibn ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir who claimed that he wrote it exactly as the *dawādār* had spelled it out, upon which Baybars exclaimed that the sultan should have a private *kātib al-sirr* to whom the sultan could dictate directly. Qalāwūn apparently overheard this and would go on to establish the position when he became sultan. One of the earliest occurences of this anecdote is found in: al-Ṣafadī, *Al-Wāfī bi-l-wafāyāt,* 10:178-9.

[61] Bernadette Martel-Thoumian, *Les civils et l'administration dans l'état militaire mamelouke (IXe/XVe siècle)* (Damascus: Institut français, 1992), 41; Eychenne, *Liens personnels*, 68. Shāfiʿ usually refers to his cousin Fatḥ al-Dīn as *ṣāḥib dīwān al-inshāʾ* and only once calls him *kātib sirri-hi,* which may in fact not necessarily denote an official function*. Faḍl,* 61. He uses the same form for his uncle in the introduction of *Ḥusn*, 55. Perhaps surprisingly, al-Ṣafadī (who related the anecdote referred to above) and even Ibn Taghrī-Birdī still referred to Fatḥ al-Dīn b. ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir as "*ṣāhib dīwān al-inshā'*". *Al-Wāfī bi-l-wafāyāt,* 17:135; *al-Manhal al-ṣāfī,* 7:99.

[62] A very liberal translation of *dast*, which in fact refers to the "platform" or "place of honor" on which they were seated during sessions in the *dār al-ʿadl*. I follow al-Musawi's usage of "bench" to explicitate the predominantly judicial context in which they were active. "Pre-Modern Belletristic Prose", 101.

regular gatherings in the *dār al-ʿadl*: they read the petitions, to which they applied the sultan's verdict (*tawqīʿ*).[63] The environment in which the *kuttāb al-darj* worked was firmly embedded in the context of correspondence and royal discourse: they formulated or copied texts commissioned by the *ṣāḥib* (or later, the *kātib al-sirr*), the *dawādār*, or the *wazīr*.

While the division of work amongst *kuttāb al-dast* and *kuttāb al-darj* suggests two different contexts, al-Qalqashandī commented that in his time, the 130 *kuttāb al-darj* employed in the *dīwān* were incapable, and that most of their work was done by more able *kuttāb al-dast*. While this comment might have more to do with al-Qalqashandī's own experiences as *kātib al-darj,*[64] it does highlight the relative fluidity in the tasks of both types of agents in the *dīwān.* Furthermore, while there must have existed a great deal of hierarchy between scribes, they should not necessarily be seen as antagonistic competitors by definition. Al-Jazarī tells us, for example, that Muḥyī al-Dīn b. ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir exchanged poetry with Kamāl al-Dīn b. al-ʿAṭṭār (d. 702 / 1302), a *kātib al-darj* from Damascus, on the delightfulness of that *kātib*'s house in the vicinity of Homs, and the ultimate delight of that *kātib*'s own poetry on that house.[65] Hierarchy does not seem like much of a factor here, and insofar as we can tell the literary exchange is conducted between equals. However, it should be noted that Ibn al-ʿAṭṭār would later grow to be a very prominent *kātib*, whose writings were widely circulated. Al-Jazarī may as such have been mistaken here to ascribe the conversation to the days in which Ibn al-ʿAṭṭār was only a *kātib al-darj*.[66]

The image one gets from secondary literature based predominantly on al-Qalqashandī is that of a quite rigidly defined institution with clearly assigned roles. It seems to be the case that the *dīwān al-inshāʾ* was a much less rigidly defined institution at the time of Baybars than what al-Qalqashandī presents, even though hierarchy had certainly been a part of it since the Abbasid period. We can make such a claim on the basis of ʿIzz al-Dīn b. Shaddād's list of persons who worked in the *dīwān* during the reign Baybars. I have structured the layout of my translation below to make the chronological layers in the text more clearly visible.

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[63] Martel-Thoumian, *Les civils*, 44. See also J.S. Nielsen, *Secular Justice in an Islamic State: Maẓālim Under the Baḥrī Mamlūks (662/1264-789/1387)* (Istanbul: Nederlands Historisch-Archeologisch Instituut, 1985), 85-87.

[64] Al-Musawi, "Pre-Modern Belletristic Prose", 110.

[65] Al-Jazarī, *Ḥawādith al-zamān,* 1:177. Al-Ṣafadī provides four further poems, two by each author, from the literary exchanges between these two, *al-Wāfī bi-l-wafāyāt,* 8:110, 111-112. Al-ʿUmarī also provides two poems from this exchange, *Masālik al-abṣār fī mamālik al-amṣār,* ed. Kāmil Salmān al-Jubūrī and Mahdī al-Najm (Beirut: Dār al-kutub al-ʿilmiyya, 2010), 12:289.

[66] See for an extensive sampling of his writings, al-ʿUmarī, *Masālik al-abṣār,* 12:271-290.

ملك – رحمه الله – وفي ديوان الإنشاء من الكتّاب القاضي فخر الدين إبراهيم ابن لقمان الأسعدي، و القاضي محيي الدين عبيد الله بن الشيخ رشيد الدين عبد الظاهر، وشمس الدين يوسف بن قريش وبدر الدين حسن بن علي الموصلي، وأخوه جمال الدين حسين بن علي، وولدا عبيد الله زين الدين وأخوه. ثم إستكتب في أيامه كمال الدين أحمد بن عز الدين عبد العزيز بن أبي جعفر محمد بن العجمي الحلبي، وفتح الدين عبد الله بن القيسراني الحلبي. ثم استدعى الصدر الكبير العالم الفاضل تاج الدين أحمد بن الصدر شرف الدين أبي البركات سعيد بن شمس الدين أبي جعفر محمد بن الأثير من دمشق، وفوض إليه أمر المترجم على عادته في الأيام الناصرية، وسعد الدين سعد الله بن مروان الفارقي، وفتح الدين محمد بن القاضي محيي الدين عبيد الله بن عبد الظاهر، وعلاء الدين أحمد بن قاضي القضاة زكي الدين المعروف بابن الزكي قاضي القضاة دمشق، ثم صرف، وعز الدين عبد العزيز بن كمال الدين أحمد العجمي بحكم وفاة والده.

[When Baybars] came to power the *kuttāb* in the *dīwān al-inshāʾ* were:

- the *qāḍī* Fakhr al-Dīn Ibrāhīm b. Luqmān al-Asʿadī
- the *qāḍī* Muḥyī l-Dīn ʿUbayd Allāh b. al-Shaykh Rashīd al-Dīn ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir
- Shams al-Dīn Yūsuf b. Quraysh
- Badr al-Dīn Ḥasan b. ʿAlī al-Mawṣilī and his brother Jamāl al-Dīn Ḥusayn b. ʿAlī
- and the two sons of ʿUbayd Allāh[,] Zayn al-Dīn and his brother.

Then were appointed as *kuttāb* (*thumma staktaba*) during his reign :

- Kamāl al-Dīn Aḥmad b. ʿIzz al-Dīn ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz b. Abī Jaʿfar Muḥammad b. al-ʿAjamī al-Ḥalabī
- Fatḥ al-Dīn ʿAbd Allāh b. al-Qaysarānī al-Ḥalabī

Then the honourable (*al-ṣadr*), the great, the knowledgeable, the excellent Tāj al-Dīn Aḥmad, son of the honourable Sharaf al-Dīn Abī l-Barakāt Saʿīd b. Shams al-Dīn Abī Jaʿfar Muḥammad b. al-Athīr was summoned from Damascus, and he was entrusted with the business of interpreter (*amr al-mutarjim*) as he had been used to in the days of al-Nāṣir [Yūsuf].

[Were also appointed] (*wa-*):

- Saʿd al-Dīn Saʿd Allāh b. Marwān al-Fāriqī
- Fatḥ al-Dīn, son of the *qāḍī* Muḥyī l-Dīn ʿUbayd Allāh b. ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir
- ʿAlāʾ al-Dīn Aḥmad, son of the chief *qāḍī* Muḥyī al-Dīn Yaḥyā, son of the chief *qāḍī* Zakī al-Dīn, known as Ibn al-Zakī, the chief *qāḍī* of Damascus, who was later dismissed (*thumma ṣurifa*)
- ʿIzz al-Dīn ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz b. Kamāl al-Dīn Aḥmad b. al-ʿAjamī by virtue of the death of his father [mentioned above].[67]

Some of these names are familiar because they appear in our sources, but others are more obscure. The fact that Ibn ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir is named ʿUbayd Allāh here (unlike ʿAbd

[67] Ibn Shaddād, *Tārīkh al-Malik al-Ẓāhir,* 238-239.

Allāh by most other historians) and that this ʿUbayd Allāh — judging by the textual position this could only denote Ibn ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir here — furthermore had two sons in the *dīwān* at the time of Baybars' ascension is especially remarkable: I have not come across other mentions of a Zayn al-Dīn b. ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir, and if "his brother" denotes Fatḥ al-Dīn b. ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir (the only son of Ibn ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir mentioned by other authors) then one wonders why he is named in full a few lines below. Whatever its actual meaning, the excerpt does highlight the importance of scribal families, with several agents being part of the chancery simply because their father had been. One of these is of course Bānū ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir itself, to which we shall now turn to look at more specifically relevant careers, after which we will explore social practices within the chancery more broadly.

2.3 Social Practice: Careers and Competition

The following sections will discuss both the members of the Bānū ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir and the ways in which their life stories may be considered representative or anomalous for general social practice in this field. I have highlighted both careers and competition in my subtitle, since Pierre Bourdieu argues that struggle and competition for resources are inherent to any social group. He also argues that the specific forms these struggles take will always be different because of the socially constructed and historically contingent nature of specific group relation, and as a result it is necessary to define and illustrate such processes more exactly as they relate to the specific historical and social contexts I am dealing with here. Since it is a major part of my argument that literary writing was used by our authors as cultural capital in such social negotiations, I will now look at these social relations in more detail, using the biographical details of our authors and their family members to zoom in on these processes. A first section will look more closely at this family, a second at their "networks of knowledge" which we can reconstruct on the basis of biographical literature, while the two last sections will deal respectively with careers and the ways patronage was crucial in them, and competition as an important part of the social relations in the field.

2.3.1 The Bānū ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir

Al-Qalqashandī refers at one point in his *Ṣubḥ al-aʿshā* to the "Bānū ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir" (literally "the sons of ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir"), noting that the members of this family dominated the chancery during the reigns of Baybars and Qalāwūn.[68] He as such implies that this was a family similar to the Bānū Faḍl Allāh who would likewise (but somewhat more prominently) dominate the *dīwān* throughout much of the eighth / fourteenth century, and one of whom, Badr al-Dīn Muḥammad b. ʿAlāʾ al-Din ʿAlī b. Faḍl Allāh, had been al-Qalqashandī's own benefactor. While this latter family is very well known and quite extensively studied, there are in fact many other families that dominated the chancery for a time.[69] The Bānū ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir has been much less well studied, despite furnishing several prominent *kuttāb/udabāʾ*.

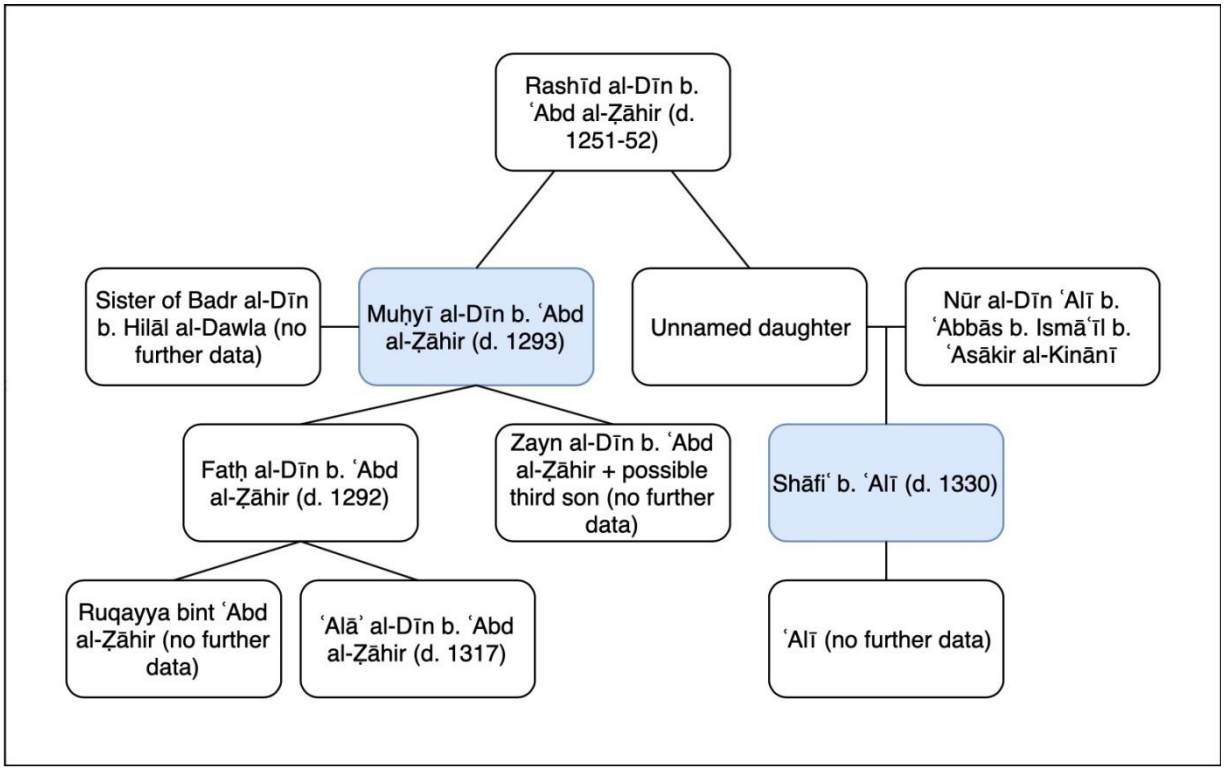

Figure 1: the Bānū ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir

Tracing the family's lineage from Rashīd al-Dīn b. ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir to his great-grandson ʿAlāʾ al-Dīn is fairly straightforward, although I have not tried to trace Rashīd al-Dīn's

[68] *Ṣubḥ*, 14:70.
[69] Thomas Bauer refers to several of them in his biography of Ibn Nubāta l-Miṣrī. T. Bauer, "Ibn Nubātah al-Miṣrī (686-768/1287-1366): Life and Works. Part I: The Life of Ibn Nubātah", *MSR* 12/1 (2008), 10.

own ancestry — which would certainly make the reconstruction more complicated.[70] All members in this branch of the family seem to have been born in Cairo and were active there, although not all of them died there. Fatḥ al-Dīn b. ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir (born in 638 / 1240-41) died in Damascus during the return journey from al-Ashraf Khalīl's conquest of Qalʿat al-Rūm, and was buried there.[71] It is unknown where ʿAlāʾ al-Dīn died, but I assume it was in Cairo, considering the fact that all other activities his biographers found worthy of mentioning took place in Cairo. Ibn al-Furāt tells us of another child of Fatḥ al-Dīn b. ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir named Ruqayya, whose mother was apparently a slave girl whom Fatḥ al-Dīn manumitted in 681 / 1282.[72] The same source also tells us in passing about a wife of Ibn ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir, who was also the sister of the Badr al-Dīn b. Hilāl al-Dawla.[73] It is not clear whether this wife was also the mother of Fatḥ al-Dīn or any of the other supposed children of our author, but the fact that this information is given only in the year 681/1281-2 may suggest that she was a younger wife than our author.

Documenting Shāfiʿ's descent is a somewhat more complicated affair, at least on his father's side — we know he was a grandson of Rashīd al-Dīn on his unnamed mother's side, which relates him firmly enough to the Ibn ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir clan, a fact often stressed by observers who refer to him as "grandson on his mother's side (*sibṭ*) of Rashīd al-Dīn b. ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir". Al-Ṣafadī, al-Nuwayrī, and al-Jazarī, the three biographers who met him personally also suggest a paternal descent from the Ibn ʿAsākir family. Although none of the biographers elaborate on this, the Bānū ʿAsākir were a family who had a prominent role in Damascene intellectual life from the late fifth / eleventh century until the latter half of the seventh / thirteenth century.[74] While the Ibn ʿAsākir name indicates that Shāfiʿ may have had ties to that famous Syrian dynasty, I have not been able to match any of his ancestors to individuals discussed by Muḥammad Muṭīʿ al-Ḥāfiẓ in his overview of persons with family relations to the famous traditionist and historian Abū l-Qāsim ʿAlī Ibn ʿAsākir.[75] The fact that Shāfiʿ's date of birth more or less coincided with the waning of that great Syrian family's importance may explain why some of its members did not make it into the voluminous biographical literature on Syrian prominent figures. In any case, the marriage of a daughter of Rashīd al-Dīn b. ʿAbd al-

[70] According to Tarek Sabraa who did reconstruct this in elaborate detail the family had its roots in modern-day Palestine and rather typically traced its genealogy to a number of early Islamic and even pre-Islamic near-legendary figures. Personal communication.
[71] Al-Ṣafadī, *al-Wāfī bi-l-wafāyāt,* 3:290.
[72] Ibn al-Furāt, *Tārīkh duwal al-mulūk, volume 7,* ed. Q. Zurayq (Beirut: al-Maṭbaʿa l-Amīrikāniyya, 1942), 249-250. Ibn al-Furāt transmits the information on this manumission on the authority of Muḥammad b. al-Mukarram (who may have been the same person as Ibn Manẓūr, the author of *Lisān al-ʿarab*), who claims to have been a witness at the conclusion of the manumission contract.
[73] Ibn al-Furāt, *Tārīkh duwal al-mulūk,* 7:258. I am grateful to Frédéric Bauden for notifying me of this.
[74] N. Elisséeff, "Ibn ʿAsākir", *EI2.*
[75] Muḥammad Muṭīʿ al-Ḥāfiẓ, *Al-hāfiẓ Ibn ʿAsākir: Muḥaddith al-Shām wa-mu'arrikh-hā al-kabīr* (Damascus: Dār al-qalam, s.d.), 66-83. I am grateful to Muhammad Maslouh for pointing me to this publication.

Ẓāhir, a respected Cairene scholar, to a person who claimed descent from one of the most renowned Syrian scholarly families does come across as quite significant. In fact, we know very little about Shāfiʿ's ancestors, as only two biographers give somewhat more information on them. Al-Jazarī accords the (possibly only honorific) titles *mawlā* and *qāḍī* to his father Nūr al-Dīn ʿAlī, and tells us that his grandfather ʿImād al-Dīn Abū l-Faḍl ʿAbbās had been a preacher (*khaṭīb*) at the Cairo Citadel and *nāʾib* at the *dār al-ʿadl* in the days of al-Ṣāliḥ Ayyūb.[76] The much later historian Ibn Ḥajar al-ʿAsqalānī (d. 852 / 1449) includes a *nasab* (genealogy), which he claims to have taken from the *Muʿjam* written by Ibn Rāfiʿ al-Salāmī (d. 774 / 1372), in which Shāfiʿ traces back his ancestry all the way to pre-Islamic times to the legendary Kināna and as such stresses the importance of his tribal adherence.[77]

Only one author mentions Shāfiʿ's son ʿAlī and does not provide any further details: when listing our author's name before detailing his literary achievements, Shihāb al-Dīn b. Faḍl Allāh al-ʿUmarī calls him "Abū ʿAlī".[78] I have not been able to find this son in the biographical literature, but I have listed him in the family tree nonetheless, as Shihāb al-Dīn also seems to have been in contact with Shāfiʿ during some time — although it remains unclear whether they met in person or not.

The family link between Shāfiʿ and his uncle is often noted by the former, but, as far as we know, never by the latter. From his reading of *al-Faḍl al-maʾthūr* and *Ḥusn al-manāqib,* P.M. Holt concluded that there was not a great deal of affection between Shāfiʿ and his relatives, who were also his colleagues.[79] There is in fact no explicit statement to this effect anywhere in Shāfiʿ's texts, but an implicit tone of rivalry may be seen in a number of anecdotes where Shāfiʿ presents his own actions as crucial for the making of political decisions, often to the detriment of his family members. On the other hand, he does always refer to his family members in respectful, sometimes even reverential tones, and very often notes their personal relationship.[80] Other bonds between the various family members are difficult to assess, as Ibn ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir does not even mention his son (or sons if we may believe what ʿIzz al-Dīn b. Shaddād suggests)

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[76] Al-Jazarī, *Ḥawādith al-zamān, 2:*428

[77] Ibn Ḥajar al-ʿAsqalānī, *al-Durar al-kāmina*, 2:185. On Ibn Rāfiʿ, see E. Ashtor, "Some Unpublished Sources for the Baḥrī Period", in *Studies in Islamic History and Civilization,* ed. U. Heyd (Jerusalem: The Magnes Press, 1961), 24-27. It should be noted that many persons with the *nisba* al-ʿAsqalānī also bore the *nisba* al-Kinānī, which suggests that the tribe had an especially strong connection to that city.

[78] *Masālik al-abṣār* 19:221.

[79] Holt, "A Chancery Clerk", 678.

[80] Shāfiʿ, *Faḍl*, 52, 56, 67, 71, 148; *Ḥusn,* 56-7, 262, 270-1, 285. Although Ibn ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir is mentioned far more often in this second text, the tone is slightly less reverent here. This may be related to the specific format of the text as an abridgement of his uncle's biography. I will return to this in more detail below, but suffice it to say here that even when he criticises his uncle a number of times, he usually does so in tones that acknowledge his status as an excellent *kātib*. At three points he even refers to his uncle as "wazīr", despite the fact that Ibn ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir most certainly never held that function: *Ḥusn*, 155, 164, 186.

anywhere in his text. Al-Ṣafadī does record an elegy written by Ibn ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir for Fatḥ al-Dīn, who died about a year before himself. One especially beautiful line of this runs as follows:

أيها الفتح أنت عَوني وسكنا كَ بقلبي فليس عنه تغيبُ
فلهذا أَمسَيتُ نصري من الله تعالى ربي وفتحٌ قريبُ

Oh Fatḥ, you are my support and your dwelling
is in my heart,[81] from whence you do not vanish
And because of that I go towards evening, victory given by God
most High my lord, while the opening (*fatḥ*) is near

This poem plays on the meaning of "*fatḥ*", part of his son's *laqab* (Fatḥ al-Dīn, honorific part of the name), which means both literally "opening" and more abstractly "victory" and "conquest", and thus is both a praise of God who bestowed a "victory" on Ibn ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir by giving him a son, and of his son who gave him cause to be proud. Considering the verb *amsaytu*'s meaning of going towards evening (a common metaphor for old age and death), Ibn ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir may also have used the meaning of "opening" in *fatḥ* to say he perceives his own end to grow near. Indeed, Ibn ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir would die in the following year and it is tempting, but of course impossible to verify, to see him grieving for his son and dying soon after. While the poem does come across as heartfelt, it is at the same time a highly typical example of poetical wordplay. It even includes an *iqtibās* ("adaptation") of Koran 61:13 in the second line,[82] which might seem strange to a modern reader who expects a highly personal rendering of emotion. For a medieval master of *inshāʾ,* however, writing about emotion, like any other topic, was by necessity mediated through literary conventions. Ricoeur calls this "the grammar that rules the composition of new works," and writes that any act of writing is a constant interplay between such received structures and the innovative practice, always resulting in new configurations of the two poles of the creative process: "sedimentation" and "innovation".[83]

[81] Another poem by Ibn ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir sent to his son when he was staying in Hama (it is not said for what reason), also addresses him as *qalbī*. Al-Ṣafadī, *al-Wāfī bi-l-wafāyāt*, 17:152.
[82] Noted by the editor in footnote: al-Ṣafadī, *al-Wāfī bi-l-wafāyāt*, 3:291.
[83] Ricoeur, *Temps et récit* 1, 132-134.

2.3.2 Networks of knowledge

Biographical dictionaries have commonly been evaluated as having a social function. Because of their predominant focus on the scholarly elites of Islamicate societies and especially the ways in which they participated in the transmission of knowledge (*ʿilm*) they may be said to have actively reproduced that social group's cohesiveness and general *raison d'être*.[84] It is thus not surprising that the vast corpus of biographical entries attested for late medieval Egypt and Syria has been mined extensively by social historians to reconstruct the dynamics of knowledge reproduction, and to map networks of learning. The simplest way by which the sources tell us about such networks quite literally concerns the transmission of knowledge: lists of scholars persons studied with, and whom they themselves later taught.

In the figure reproduced below I have visualised such a network in very basic fashion, as a full network analysis lies beyond the scope of this dissertation. I have not reproduced all the known teachers and students, but instead focused on a number of reappearing nodes which may be insightful about the intellectual networks in which our authors participated. In fact, none of the entries in biographical dictionaries are extremely detailed about the educational trajectories of our authors (they are even silent about these trajectories for the later scions of the family), focusing instead mostly on their literary achievements (the network of which I have visualised below in 3.1.). Yet, even in this very basic form, a picture of intellectual transmission emerges which highlights a number of common relations that would otherwise perhaps not be as clear.

One of the more interesting commonalities is the appearance of the famous traditionist and historian ʿAlam al-Dīn al-Birzālī, who transmitted on the authorities of both Ibn ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir and Shāfiʿ, as well as on that of a number of other agents professionally connected to our authors: Fatḥ al-Dīn b. al-Qaysarānī, vizier under Baybars' son al-Saʿīd Bereke, and Shihāb al-Dīn Maḥmūd b. Fahd al-Ḥalabī, who was active in the *dīwān* both in Cairo (between 692 / 1293 and 717 / 1317) and Damascus (before and after his period in Cairo).[85] I will have much more to say about the latter below. That al-Birzālī appears so prominently is not really surprising when we consider the general pervasiveness of his presence as student in other people's biographical entries. As al-Ṣafadī tells us, "he loved to ask for *ḥadīth,* transcribe volumes, and make

[84] Chamberlain, *Knowledge and Social Practice,* 133-137.

[85] Al-Ṣafadī, *al-Wāfī bi-l-wafāyāt,* vol. 17:317 & vol. 25:167-168. Although Shihāb al-Dīn was not the leader of the *dīwān* in Cairo, as he would become in Damascus, he was without a doubt here also a prominent *kātib*. Ibn Faḍl Allāh al-ʿUmarī for example quotes the caliphal *ʿahd* for the sultan al-ʿĀdil Kitbughā written by him. Shihāb al-Dīn b. Faḍl Allāh al-ʿUmarī, *al-Taʿrīf bi-l-muṣṭalaḥ al-sharīf,* ed. Muḥammad Ḥusayn Shams al-Dīn (Beirut: Dār al-kutub al-ʿilmiyya, 1988), 121.

the rounds of shaykhs".[86] The same author also informs us about his historiographical activities, which adds an interesting dimension to the connection with our authors: while al-Birzālī is generally considered as part of the so-called "Syrian school" of historiography in the period, it is clear that he also had important connections to historians of the "military-bureaucratic" Egyptian school.[87]

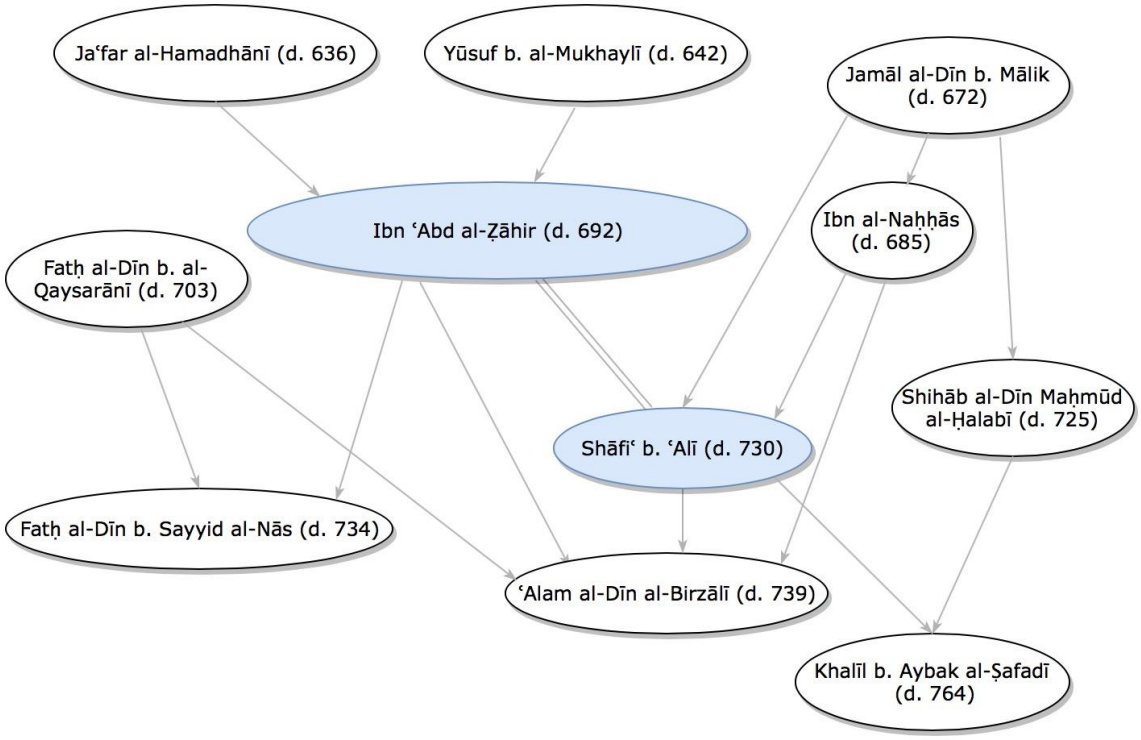

Figure 2: Knowledge transmission to and from Ibn ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir and Shāfiʿ b. ʿAlī [88]

Another interesting node is Jamāl al-Dīn b. Mālik (d. 672 / 1274), a scholar of Andalusian extraction who ended up in Syria and who wrote one of the most widely read and discussed (verse) texts on Arabic grammar, *al-Khulāsa al-alfiyya*. His link is noted explicitly to Shāfiʿ and Shihāb al-Dīn Maḥmūd, as well as to his contemporary Ibn al-Naḥḥās, another famous grammarian who taught both Shāfiʿ and al-Birzālī.[89] That both these teachers of Shāfiʿ were known as grammarians is probably not random: it is

[86] Al-Ṣafadī, *al-Wāfī bi-l-wafāyāt,* 24:120.
[87] For a recent evaluation of these historiographic "schools", see R.B. Olsen, "Just Taxes? Tracing 14th Century Damascene Politics through Objects, Space and Historiography" (Unpublished PhD thesis, Birkbeck College, University of London, 2017), 26 and specifically focused on one episode 172-230.
[88] Arrows denote the direction of transmission from teacher to student. The double line between our two authors denotes their family connection. I have not found any information about the education of Ibn ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir's son and grandson, so they are not included in this visualisation.
[89] Ibn Ḥajar al-ʿAsqalānī even states explicitly that Shāfiʿ was taught grammar by Ibn al-Naḥḥās. Unlike al-Ṣafadī he also names a number of other teachers. *Al-Durar al-kāmina,* 7:185. On Ibn al-Naḥḥās himself, see al-Ṣafadī, *al-Wāfī bi-l-wafāyāt,* 5:146.

clear that biographers considered Shāfiʿ to be foremost an *adīb* and remembered him for his eloquence and excellent poetry, so the fact that some of his most important teachers were grammarians stresses once more our author's linguistic self-profilation.

A last agent to whom I would like to draw attention is Fatḥ al-Dīn b. Sayyid al-Nās, who is named as a student of both Ibn ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir and the vizier Fatḥ al-Dīn b. al-Qaysarānī. Known both for his skill in poetry and *ḥadīth,* it is foremost his Prophetic *sīra* which secured his fame for posterity.[90] Al-Ṣafadī, who is the source for both mentions of Ibn Sayyid al-Nās as a student of these authors, does not tell us what he learned exactly from them, but the fact that he was renowned in both poetry and *ḥadīth* is illustrative of the fact that education of the period involved both to a large degree.

What is remarkable in general, is how few of the authors we find in these transmission networks were active in the chancery. That is, our network includes several chancery agents, but none of them are linked to each other in a network of learning in the same text. We know that Fatḥ al-Dīn b. al-Qaysarānī and Ibn ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir were colleagues, but the relation between the two is not dealt with by any biographer I have consulted. Neither is the professional link between Shihāb al-Dīn Maḥmūd and our authors ever explicitated, although we have ample evidence of literary exchanges between them, which I will discuss below. Even Ibn Ḥabīb and Ibn al-Ṣuqāʿī, whose biographical dictionaries contain a wealth of anecdotes related to *kuttāb* and *udabāʾ,* do not really talk about the relations between these persons in terms of learning and transmission. The networks condensed in the preceding figure and paragraphs thus reflect broader social practice than those found in the anecdotes and general reports more strictly dealing with the activities of *kuttāb*, and they highlight as such the broader social embeddedness of our authors. I will show in Chapter Three how a closer look at literary exchanges further broadens this pallette of social practice.

2.3.3 Career paths and patronage

Despite the relatively wide-ranging education our authors received, they undoubtedly both ended up in the chancery. The roads to working in the *dīwān* have been studied quite extensively, and scholars have distinguished heredity, clientelism/nepotism, and venality as the major routes, though none of these was dominant at any given time.[91] These practices in which merit or talent were not primary concerns may explain al-

[90] F. Rosenthal, "Ibn Sayyid al-Nās", *EI2.*
[91] For the ninth / fifteenth century, see Martel-Thoumian, *Civils et administration*, 82-92. For a wider diachronic discussion of backgrounds and social status of people working in chanceries of the Middle Period, see A. Gully, *The Culture of Letter Writing in Pre-Modern Islamic Society* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2008), 72-101.

Qalqashandī's above-mentioned comments concerning the inability of many of his colleagues in the *dīwān,* but in general the chancery does seem to have been able to recruit the necessary talent to write prose correspondence of the required quality. Escovitz has for example highlighted that despite the importance of chancery dynasties such as the famous Bānū Faḍl Allāh, the Bānū al-Qaysarānī, or, indeed, the Bānū ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir itself, these were never "able to restrict access to the chancery exclusively to their children or relatives".[92] Neither were the leaders of the chancery "a homogeneous caste of 'men of the pen' [...] devoted only to the smooth running of the Mamlūk administration, but rather a heterogeneous group from diverse backgrounds, with strong and active ties to the religious institution".[93] This contrasts quite sharply with earlier profiles of *kuttāb* in the well-studied Abbasid period, when they are said to have consisted of a rather more narrow and homogenous segment of the population.[94]

While Escovitz' sweeping study of two and a half centuries of *kuttāb* is useful in highlighting general patterns, it does obscure some of the particularities of individual careers. Bernadette Martel-Thoumian and more recently Matthieu Eychenne have thrown much more light on these individual trajectories by gathering a wealth of information on various social relations between the military elites and their scribes. Escovitz failed to find any overarching structures in vocational and employment patterns and thus already anticipated the ideas of historical contingency and particularity that are gaining ever more ground in historical research today, and Eychenne corroborated this with a lot more data to assess the pervasiveness of the personal relation between patron and client. In the following paragraphs I will look at a number of such relations as they are reflected in or relevant to the lives of our authors.

We do not know exactly how our authors ended up working in the chancery. Ibn ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir, the oldest member of our chancery dynasty, appears quite suddenly and rather prominently on the scene in the early years of Baybars' sultanate. It is however likely that he had a function under Quṭuz already as al-Qalqashandī quotes a diplomatic letter written to Yemen during his reign which he "thinks" was written by Ibn ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir.[95] As we have seen above, ʿIzz al-Dīn b. Shaddād also lists him as a *kātib* at the start of Baybars' reign. The first piece of chancery writing he quotes himself dates from Baybars' early years as sultan. At this point he was not yet in a leading position, however, as he

[92] Escovitz, "Vocational Patterns", 50.
[93] Ibidem, 55. He found similar results for scribes less high up in the hierarchy.
[94] Ibidem, 62.
[95] al-Qalqashandī, *Ṣubḥ al-aʿshā,* 7:360-362 (*wa-**aẓunnu**-hā min inshāʾ al-qāḍī Muḥyī al-Dīn b. ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir,* he also discusses at the end of the letter that he found the letter in a collection and can not vouch for its authenticity). It should be noted that there is another moment where al-Qalqashandī is clearly mistaken when ascribing a text to Ibn ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir, such as a short diploma of investiture for al-Nāṣir Muḥammad dating from 717/1317, which is impossible considering that our author died even before al-Nāṣir Muḥammad's first ascension of the throne.

specifically refers to Fakhr al-Dīn b. Luqmān (d. 693 / 1293) as "*ṣāḥib dīwān al-inshā*ʾ" and as the one who wrote the prestigious diploma of investiture (*taqlīd*) of the caliph al-Mustanṣir in 659 / 1261.[96] He remains referring to Ibn Luqmān as "*al-ṣāḥib*" throughout the first quarter of his *sīra* of Baybars, so it seems that they switched positions in the latter part of Baybars' reign.[97] At the same time, Shāfiʿ claims that the prestigious *khuṭba* (Friday sermon) given by the second Cairene Abbasid caliph al-Ḥākim (d. 701 / 1302) in the presence of Mongol messengers from the Golden Horde was written by his uncle, which suggests that Ibn ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir had attained an important position in the chancery already early on in the 660s / 1260s.[98]

While his exact position in the chancery of Baybars is somewhat unclear at this early point, we do know Ibn ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir already held a position of some fame in Cairene literary circles well before Baybars' sultanate, as one of his most famous texts, a *risāla* (epistle) in which he denounced an unnamed Shīʿī criticiser, is dated to 653 / 1255-56. This dating does not come from an original manuscript however, but is given by al-Ṣafadī who claimed to have copied it in full "from [Ibn ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir's] handwriting" and included it in his own extensive commentary on an Andalusian epistle, *Tamām al-mutūn fi sharḥ risālat Ibn Zaydūn*.[99] In his biographical lemma on Ibn ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir, al-Ṣafadī also includes another *risāla* (epistle) "presented as a gift to a number of high-ranking *kuttāb* in the days of al-Muʿizz [Aybak, d. 655 / 1257]", which starts off by praising the importance of their writing.[100] Considering the fact that Ibn ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir did not have

[96] *Rawḍ*, 101. Identical in Shāfiʿ, *Ḥusn*, 81. More than a century later al-Qalqashandī still referred to Ibn Luqmān as "*al-ṣāḥib*" in *Ṣubḥ al-aʿshā,* vol. 11:111.

[97] *Rawḍ*, 161, 163. As a comparison, Ibn Luqmān's own career path is a bit better known due to a lemma about him in Ibn al-Ṣuqāʿī *Tālī kitāb wafayāt al-aʿyān,* a work that was also extensively mined by Eychenne because it is so informative about the career paths of *kuttāb* (it is unfortunately mostly silent about the members of the Bānū ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir). Ibn al-Ṣuqāʿī tells us that Ibn Luqmān served in Āmid before its conquest by the Ayyubid sultan al-Malik al-Kāmil (d. 635 / 1238), upon which he was taken in by his vizier Bahāʾ al-Dīn b. Zuhayr, who would continue to serve al-Ṣāliḥ Ayyūb as vizier. The famous historian Ibn Wāṣil was active in the same circles and enjoyed a similar *ṣuḥba/mulāzama* relation with the vizier (see K. Hirschler, *Medieval Arabic Historiography: Authors as Actors* (London: Routledge, 2006), 19-20, 23). It is not known what Ibn Luqmān did in the decade between al-Ṣāliḥ Ayyūb's death and Baybars' ascension, when he appears again as leader of the *dīwān* and according to Ibn al-Ṣuqāʿī would go on to "ascend [the hierarchy] until he became *wazīr*" himself in Qalāwūn's days. Al-Ṣuqāʾī, *Tālī,* 9. On whether either Ibn Luqmān or Ibn ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir effectively led Baybars' chancery, see the comments by Holt, "A Chancery Clerk in Medieval Egypt", 671.

[98] Shāfiʿ, *Ḥusn*, 108. Ibn ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir includes the same sermon, but does not mention its author: *Rawḍ,* 142-143. Shāfiʿ's claim is corroborated by al-ʿUmarī, *Taʿrīf*, 121 and several later historians.

[99] Al-Ṣafadī, *Tamām al-mutūn fī sharḥ risālat Ibn Zaydūn,* ed. Muḥammad Abū l-Faḍl Ibrāhīm (Sidon/Beirut: Mansūrāt al-maktaba l-ʿaṣriyya, 1969), 404. The text of Ibn ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir's epistle is given on pages 404-415. On the particular context of al-Ṣafadī quoting this material, see Everett K. Rowson's insightful article "An Alexandrian Age in Fourteenth-Century Damascus: Twin Commentaries on Two Celebrated Arabic Epistles", *MSR*, 7/1 (2003), 108-9. A *risāla* by Ibn ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir — it is not exactly clear whether it is the same one as that copied by al-Ṣafadī — allegedly survives in at least four manuscripts: three are in the Egyptian Dār al-kutub (Adab 3911, Majāmiʿ 840, and Adab Taymūr 34) and one in Damascus (Maktabat al-Asad MS 9205, fols. 171b-181a).

[100] al-Ṣafadī, *Wāfī l-wafāyāt,* 17:141. أهداها إلى جماعة من الكتاب في الأيام المعزية الأقدار

any known association with the *dīwān,* he likely used this work to gain a position there. We do not know whether he was successful this time, but his sudden appearance in a high position in the *dīwān* some years later may in fact suggest a good outcome for this offering — its survival for al-Ṣafadī to copy is also a possible argument in favour of a successful undertaking.

The rise of Ibn ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir's son Fatḥ al-Dīn into the chancery is also fairly obscure, although we can assume that some degree of heredity was at play here. As noted, ʿIzz al-Dīn b. Shaddād lists him as one of the *kuttāb* who joined the *dīwān al-inshāʾ* during Baybars' sultanate.[101] We do have some information about how he eventually became *ṣāhib,* and perhaps eventually the first *kātib al-sirr,* during Qalāwūn's reign. Al-Ṣafadī notes that "he became master [of the *dīwān al-inshāʾ*] in the *dawla* of al-Manṣūr [Qalāwūn] because of his insight (*ʿaql*), his vision (*raʾay*), his ambition (*himma*), and the closeness (*taqaddum*) to his father, the *qāḍī* Muḥyī al-Dīn [b. ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir]", implying a mixture of merit and heredity. Further on, however, he mentions that it was in fact Ibn Luqmān who chose Fatḥ al-Dīn as his successor when he was asked to name a substitute upon being named vizier by Qalāwūn.[102] Both al-Ṣafadī and al-Nuwayrī inform us that he attained a position of high influence (*tamakkana*) under Qalāwūn and al-Ashraf Khalīl.[103] Al-Nuwayrī adds the interesting little fact that after his death in mid-Ramaḍān 691 / August 1292, "the sultan al-Malik al-Ashraf [Khalīl] bestowed his salary (*jāmikiyya*), daily food rations (*jirāya*), and his pay (*rātib*) to his son, the *qāḍī* ʿAlāʾ al-Dīn ʿAlī and he remained among the group of *kuttāb al-inshāʾ*", which seems to confirm a type of pensionary pratice for *kuttāb* which we also see in Shāfiʿ's case – about which, see below in this section.[104] The position of *kātib al-sirr* was however not given to ʿAlāʾ al-Dīn at that time, according to Baybars al-Manṣūrī because of his young age.[105] ʿAlāʾ al-Dīn did become early on in his life one of the youngest *kuttāb* ever in the *dīwān*, allegedly making his debut there when he was only eleven years old in 686 / 1287, undoubtedly once more a marker of the strength of heredity as a road to the *dīwān.* Later on, he would cast his lot with the powerful amir Salār (d. 710 / 1310), who dominated politics during al-Nāṣir Muḥammad's second reign together with the amir Baybars al-Jāshnikīr, a move that backfired when al-Nāṣir Muḥammad reasserted his personal authority upon his return to the sultanate in 710 / 1310.[106]

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[101] *Tārīkh al-Malik al-Ẓāhir,* 239.
[102] Al-Ṣafadī, *al-Wāfī bi-l-wafāyāt*, 3:290.
[103] On similar terms, see Eychenne, *Liens personnels*, 36-37.
[104] al-Nuwayrī, *Nihāyat al-arab*, 31:154-5. This is also reproduced in two separate accounts by Ibn al-Furāt, *Tārīkh Ibn al-Furāt, volume 8* (Beirut: al-Maṭbaʿa al-Amīrikāniyya, 1939), 144, 150.
[105] Baybars al-Manṣūrī, *Zubdat al-fikra,* 291
[106] Al-Ṣafadī, *al-Wāfī bi-l-wafāyāt*, 22:35-36. See also, N. Rabbat, *The Citadel of Cairo*, 199, n. 45. See 2.3.4. below.

Aside from this last association of ʿAlāʾ al-Dīn to Salār and Fatḥ al-Dīn's association with Ibn Luqmān, mentions of patronage are conspicuously absent from the accounts about agents from the main branch from the Ibn ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir family. Ibn ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir himself emerges on the scene seemingly without the help of any benefactor, and his son and grandson presumably did so mostly because of the patronage of Ibn ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir himself, at least initially. Yet, we know from many other career paths of *kuttāb* that patronage was crucial in attaining a position of some importance in the chancery. As noted, Ibn Luqmān owed his position to a vizier recruiting him, and Ibn ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir's contemporary ʿIzz al-Dīn b. Shaddād, often specifically stresses that he served the vizier Bahāʾ al-Dīn b. Ḥinnā and reserves laudatory language in large part for praising this vizier.[107] Considering his position as vizier, Ibn Ḥinnā was of course also a powerful agent to whom Ibn ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir owed allegiance, and judging from the way in which he addresses him in a letter sent to update the vizier on what happened during Baybars' expedition in Anatolia there was certainly a sense of hierarchy here, but it is not exactly clear whether we should see their relation as one of "patronage" in a strict sense, or as emanating from their personal relationship in which the one directly secures benefit for the other.[108]

Matters are more clear in the case of Shāfiʿ. His earliest claim to having written an official document is a letter announcing the death of Baybars to his son Bereke in the name of Baybars' viceroy of Damascus Badr al-Dīn Baylīk al-Khāzindār, the text of which is included at the end of *Ḥusn al-manāqib.*[109] While he does not tell us anything about how he ended up working there, he does provide some information in his *sīra* of Qalāwūn about his somewhat later ascension in the chancery under Baybars' successor al-Saʿīd Bereke. Shāfiʿ himself starts appearing in the narrative of this text during Bereke's short reign, claiming that he served him in some form as *kātib.* Near the end of this reign he provides us with the following account:

> كنت مع الملك السعيد في هذه الكَرّة وكان له دواداران، أحدهما الأمير الإسفهلار سيف الدين بلبان الرومي الظاهري والآخر دونه في الرتبة وهو الأمير عز الدين أيدمر الدوادار. وكان حظّي من الأمير سيف الدين الحظ الأوفى الأوفر * ومحلّي من تقدمته المحلّ الأعلى الأكبر. * فإنه هو الذي ندبني بخدمة السلطان وعول عليّ في سر المكاتبات وجهرها على صغر سنّي وكِبَر قدر وسنّ من في الديوان.
>
> I was [serving] with al-Malik al-Saʿīd at this time, and he had two *dawādārs.* One of them was the *amīr al-isfahlār* Sayf al-Dīn Balābān al-Rūmī al-Ẓāhirī, and the other,

[107] Ibn Shaddād, *Tārīkh al-Malik al-Ẓāhir*, 79-83 (especially 81-2), 168, 225, 234. Ibn al-Ṣuqāʿī attaches Ibn Shaddād's "importance" during Baybars' sultanate to his *mulāzama* bond with the vizier. *Tālī,* 135.
[108] *Rawḍ*, 454. On this letter, see below 6.2.1.2.
[109] *Ḥusn,* 342-348.

> ʿIzz al-Dīn Aydamur al-Dawādār, was below him in rank. I enjoyed more loyal and more advanced favour (*al-ḥaẓẓ al-awfā wa-l-awfar*) from the amir Sayf al-Dīn and my place was because of his gift (*min taqdimati-hi*) the highest and greatest place. For he was the one who appointed me to serve the sultan, and he relied on me for both secret and public correspondence (*sirr al-mukātabāt wa jahr-hā*) despite my young age and the greatness of the capacity and age of those who were [already] in the *dīwān*.[110]

The anecdote goes on for several more lines, detailing how Shāfiʿ neglected to write a letter to the Ismāʿīlī's to request their help in al-Malik al-Saʿīd's struggles with Qalāwūn. Shāfiʿ defected to Qalāwūn's camp immediately after. The historicity of the account may be doubtful, as no other author mentions Shāfiʿ's actions, which are here effectively portrayed as a major part of the *coup de grâce* for al-Malik al-Saʿīd's sultanate, but it is quite insightful for the relation between *dawādār* and *kātib*. Balābān's importance to the *dīwān* is clear here: Shāfiʿ claims that he was the one who could appoint *kuttāb* to very high positions, even directly serving the sultan. However, we also know that Balābān's loyalty towards Baybars cost him his position of power when Qalāwūn took over the reins, because the new sultan shifted a number of responsibilities from office to office, in the process greatly curtailing the wide-ranging duties of the *dawādār*.[111] The fact that Shāfiʿ explicitly names Balābān al-Rūmī as his patron is furthermore interesting because one might have expected his uncle Ibn ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir in that role, considering his leading position in the *dīwān.* Shāfiʿ in fact never implies that his position there was dependent on his uncle's position.[112]

Instead, Shāfiʿ explicitly stresses his links to Balabān. Another time he claims to have been "a *kātib* of *inshāʾ* [...] in the *ṣuḥba* of [al-Manṣūr Qalāwūn]",[113] only to add a few pages later that he accompanied Balabān al-Rūmī, also using the same term "*ṣuḥba*".[114] This term, which is related to a meaning of companionship, was an oft-used denominator in conjunction with, or more or less synonymous to the term *mulāzama,* for a variety of close personal relationships between individuals. Despite the personal nature of such a bond, Konrad Hirschler has argued that these relationships do have a

[110] *Faḍl*, 49.
[111] Northrup, *From Slave to Sultan*, 241.
[112] At one point he does reproduce a suggestive little part of direct colloquial speech from Qalāwūn ordering Ibn ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir to write a number of documents, in which he says "take your two sons (*khudh waladay-ak*)." Considering the context, and as we know of no other child of Ibn ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir than Fatḥ al-Dīn (unless we accept ʿIzz al-Dīn b. Shaddād's claim that there were two more sons working in the chancery during Baybars' reign), I assume Shāfiʿ is the other "son" here, *Faḍl*, 52.
[113] *Ḥusn*, 271. The sultan is not explicitly mentioned in this sentence, but it is contextually clear that he is the only likely candidate for this *ṣuḥba* relationship.
[114] *Ḥusn*, 275.

number of core features in common: they "contained a degree of hierarchy", were "characterized by a degree of formalization" as well as "a degree of mutual exclusivity", and "yielded concrete advantages".[115] These specifics still leave ample wiggle room for the specific forms such relations could take, depending on the social status of those who engaged in them. For example, Shāfiʿ could use the term interchangeably to refer to either the *dawādār* or the sultan, implying perhaps that his *ṣuḥba* to Balabān was indirectly also a *ṣuḥba* to the sultan, as Balabān himself enjoyed a *ṣuḥba* relationship of sorts to Baybars, being an amir from his own Ẓāhirī *mamlūk* corps. Furthermore, this relationship was apparently flexible (or it was conceivable to present it as flexible), for at another point our author claims to have refused to oblige the sultan's order to accompany Balabān on a mission to Tripoli on the grounds that he did not want to affront his cousin Fatḥ al-Dīn and that he furthermore thought the whole mission would not have a good effect. Here, apparently, Shāfiʿ's *ṣuḥba* relationship is overriden by family loyalties.[116]

Coincidentally, Balabān al-Rūmī is said to have died during the same Battle of Homs in which Shāfiʿ himself was blinded. The account of this event does not mention Balabān, so I think it is more likely he died during another part of the fighting. But Shāfiʿ's personal account is worth reproducing nonetheless. The account is given by al-Jazarī who asked him about this ordeal during a personal meeting:

> فسألته عن سبب عماه فقال: في وقعة حمص سنة ثمانين دخلتُ أنا وشمس الدين ابن قريش رفيقي أحد كتاب الإنشاء إلى بستان وجمعة كبيرة، فما كان إلا ساعة والتتر قد دخلوا إلينا، فوقع في رأسي سهم نشّاب فاختلط دماغي ووقعت بين القتلى وقتل كل من كان في البستان. فلما كان في الليل قمت ومشيت ووقع لي من أوصلني إلى العسكر ومرضت وعميت، وأبقا عليّ السلطان الشهيد الملك المنصور جامكيتي التي كانت لي في الديوان والراتب فأنا أتناوله إلى الآن.

> I asked him about the reason for his blindness and he said: 'During the Battle of Homs in the year [6]80, I and Shams al-Dīn b. Quraysh,[117] my friend (*rafīqī*), one of the *kuttāb* of the *inshāʾ*, entered a garden with a large group, where an hour later the Tatars came upon us. A bowman's arrow entered my head and hit my brain, and I ended up among those killed. Everyone who was in that garden was killed. When it was night I stood up and walked away. Then someone who came across me led me to the army and I was nursed and became blind. The martyred sultan

[115] Hirschler, *Medieval Arabic Historiography*, 19-20. See also Eychenne, *Liens personnels,* 43-45.
[116] *Faḍl,* 148.
[117] Al-Ṣafadī tells us this man was about seventy years old at the time, that he was a *kātib al-darj* (like Shāfiʿ) and that he had served continuously in the chancery since the days of al-Ṣāliḥ Ayyūb. *Al-Wāfī bi-l-wafāyāt*, 29:34.

> al-Malik al-Manṣūr maintained my monthly pay (*jāmakiyya*) which I had in the *dīwān,* and the ration (*rātib*) which I still receive now.[118]

While the account itself is engrossing in all its shortness, it is also interesting for Shāfiʿ's claim of having kept his salary and pay even after becoming blind. As we have seen before, al-Ṣafadī mentions that our author was obliged to retire, expressed by the sentence "*lāzama [min-hu] bayta-hu*", which I interpret as meaning "it obliged him [to stay at] his house",[119] although it is not a straightforward expression to translate in this context.[120] The fact that a form of *l-z-m* is used here, while the related form *mulāzama* is also used to denote a patronage relationship, is intriguing, but it would require a close and more broadly assessed semantic and semiotic study to really gauge its significance. It is in any case clear that it means here that Shāfiʿ's career as a *kātib* ended because of his blindness.

Shāfiʿ himself does not say anything to this effect in his *sīra*'s, and even claims to have remained a *kātib* in later years. He does stop writing his *sīra* of Qalāwūn in chronographic fashion after this battle, switching to a more thematic approach, where his claims of having been *kātib* can not so easily be linked to specific events. In his *sīra* of al-Nāṣir Muḥammad he claims to have written an official letter to Yemen in the year 704 / 1304 and the Caliph's *taqlīd* for al-Nāṣir Muḥammad upon his third accession in 709 / 1309. Neither of these documents appear elsewhere, and Shāfiʿ is never mentioned as a *kātib* serving al-Nāṣir Muḥammad. According to the later biographer Ibn Khaṭīb al-Nāṣiriyya (d. 843 / 1451), an anecdote about Shāfiʿ tripping over the tent ropes of Qalāwūn's *dihlīz* (sultanic tent) connected to an epigram written about it by the famous scholar Ibn Sayyid al-Nās (d. 734 / 1334), should be situated in the year 691 / 1291.[121] That date is however problematic as Qalāwūn died in 689 / 1290. Al-Ṣafadī does confirm that Ibn Sayyid al-Nās was a student of Ibn ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir, so a connection to Shāfiʿ is not

[118] Al-Jazarī, *Ḥawādith* 2:429.

[119] Al-Ṣafadī uses a form with "*min-hu*" in *Aʿyān al-aṣr,* and a form without it in *Nakt al-himyān fī nukat al-ʿumyān,* ed. Aḥmad Zakī Bak (Cairo: al-Maṭbaʿah al-Jamāliyya, 1911), 163.

[120] The expression has a strong connotation of house arrest. ʿIzz al-Dīn b. Shaddād uses a number of similar forms: "*lazama bayta-hu*" in describing the house arrest of a particularly fateful *kātib* from Mosul, and "*mulāziman bayta-hu*" when describing the arrest of the Anatolian vizier Khawaja ʿAlī al-Madʿū Fakhr al-Dīn. *Tārīkh al-Malik al-Ẓāhir*, 116, 63. Another similar form is used by Ibn Taghrī-Birdī in a biography of the chief *qāḍī* ʿAlam al-Dīn al-Bisāṭī al-Mālikī (d. 786 / 1384) who was put under house arrest until he died. *Al-manhal al-ṣāfī,* 6:28. I am grateful to Maya Termonia for providing me with this last reference. While the connotation ofn enforced house arrest seems somewhat unlikely for Shāfiʿ, it does imply that his career as a *kātib* ended.

[121] Ibn Khaṭīb al-Nāṣiriyya, *al-Durr al-muntakhab bi-takmilat tārīkh Ḥalab,* MS Gotha Orient A1772, 59v-60r. The author acknowledges Ibn Rāfiʿ as a source (as does Ibn Ḥajar al-ʿAsqalānī), but his *Muʿjam* in which this information would be found has not been preserved. I am grateful to Tarek Sabraa for providing me with this reference. The anecdote and epigram are also found in Ibn Ḥabīb's *Tadhkira al-nabīh,* 208. However, here the anecdote is neither ascribed nor dated beyond the statement that it happened during Qalāwūn's sultanate.

unlikely, but it is difficult to assess the importance of this isolated anecdote for Shāfiʿ's later career. It is equally difficult to assess the veracity of Shāfiʿ's claims to have written later texts, but I will formulate a hypothesis in Part 2 and 3 of this dissertation that Shāfiʿ might have used his *sīra*'s as ways of proving that he could still write the type of prose required of a *kātib* and that he used them as a way of getting back into the *dīwān* or strengthening his relationship with one or more of its agents after his familial ties with the institution dried up.

The issue of Shāfiʿ's continued remuneration brings us to one of the most direct effects of patronage: the financial part, by which scribes benefited of the sultan's or one of his amirs' vast redistribution of wealth as part of their household politics. In addition to the direct payments, here referred to as *jāmikiyya* or *rātib*, which Shāfiʿ apparently was able to keep even after being sent home, members of the *dīwān al-inshāʾ* were also rewarded for their services in other ways.[122] Both Ibn ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir himself and Shāfiʿ b. ʿAlī mention Baybars' distribution of *khilʿa*'s, robes of honour, to Ibn ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir.[123] While a richly embroidered *khilʿa* was in itself already a wealthy gift, it is also, and perhaps more importantly, an acknowledgement or an accordance of status, a clear paternal and patronal gesture which symbolises the sultan's recognition of the recipient's embeddedness in his sultanic household. ʿIzz al-Dīn b. Shaddād confirms that *kuttāb* were among those receiving robes of honour on special occasions. For al-Saʿīd Bereke's marriage he lists "all the amirs, the viziers, the judges, the *kuttāb,* the physicians, and the prominent among the servants" as benefiting from such a treatment.[124]

2.3.4 Competition

These kinds of prestigious rewards, as well as the more basic stipends and salaries given to *kuttāb* described above are doubtlessly part of the reason why attaining a high position in the chancery was a desirable thing. As noted at the outset of this subchapter, it naturally engendered a great deal of competition among agents in this field. Consider for example how, after discussing the reception of the renowned *kātib* Ḍiyāʾ al-Dīn b. al-Athīr's (d. 637 / 1239) somewhat controversial opinions on prose, poetry, and the

[122] On the systems of payment in the period, though specifically focused on the army, see D. Ayalon, "The System of Payment in Mamluk Military Society", *JESHO* 1/1 (1957), 48 (on the *jāmakiyya*), 61 (on the *rātib,* footnote 4).
[123] *Rawḍ,* 165; *Ḥusn al-manāqib*, 339.
[124] Ibn Shaddād, *Tārīkh al-Malik al-Ẓāhir*, 166.

specific stylistics involved,[125] by such well-regarded scholars as Ibn Abī l-Ḥadīd (d. 656 / 1257) and the earlier mentioned Khalīl b. Aybak al-Ṣafadī, Muhsin al-Musawi adds the following afterthought:

> Had the chancery not been a venue for challenge and reward, there would presumably have been no call for dispute or even contrafaction in the first place.[126]

Al-Musawi, who elsewhere in the same article refers to a "sense of rivalry and competition" among chancery scribes, leaves these comments as they stand without further qualifying in which exact ways "challenges", "rewards", "disputes", and "contrafactions" took place in this context. Of course the noted literary elaborations and challenges by Ibn Abī l-Ḥadīd and al-Ṣafadī are already pertinent examples, and the ways in which Ibn al-Athīr himself took on the opinions of illustrious *kuttāb* from earlier generations is certainly suggestive for such an atmosphere of contention. But the comment does imply that "challenge and reward" might mean more than reception of works by contemporary peers or later readers. Adrian Gully gives several examples of contention and scribes trying "to gain intellectual precedence over the other",[127] and the relative abundance of treatises against Christian scribes appearing in this period has also been interpreted in the light of struggles between Muslims and non-Muslims competing for the same positions.[128]

When considered amongst these polemical struggles and biographies of their peers, the career patterns of our authors and their family members are rather anomalous. None of them were shifted from bureau to bureau and they apparently spent their entire active careers in the *dīwān al-inshāʾ*. They even continued to be remunerated after their activity ended or were given the salary of their deceased father. The only author in the Bānū ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir about whom we have a more extended career description is ʿAlāʾ al-Dīn b. ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir, about whom al-Ṣafadī provides a fairly long account:

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[125] G.J.H. Van Gelder, *Beyond the Line: Classical Arabic Literary Critics on the Coherence and Unity of a Poem* (Leiden: Brill, 1982), 146-152.
[126] al-Musawi, "Pre-Modern Belletristic Prose", 106.
[127] Gully, *The Culture of Letter-Writing*, 77.
[128] Luke Yarbrough, "The Madrasa and the Non-Muslims of Thirteenth-Century Egypt: A Reassessment" in *Entangled Histories: Knowledge, Authority, and Jewish Culture in the Thirteenth Century,* eds. E. Baumgarten, R. Mazo Karras, and K. Mesler (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2017), 93-112; Eychenne, *Liens personnels,* 75-77; Yarbrough "'A rather small genre': Arabic Works Against Non-Muslim State Officials", *Der Islam* 93/1 (2016), 139-169.

وكان من الواجهة في الدولة الناصرية أولاً في المحلّ الأقصى وفي الدولة المذكورة بعد قدوم السلطان من الكرك أيضًا في محل دون الأول يراه الناس بالعين الأولى ويعظّمونه جدًا. وكان في خدمة الأمير سيف الدين سلار يكتب قدّامه ويوقّع أيام نيابته، فكرهه السلطان الملك الناصر. أخبرني القاضي شهاب الدين بن فضل الله من لفظه قال: قال لي السلطان ما كرهته لأجل شيئ وإنما خان مخدومه يعني سلار لأنه استكتبه شيئًا واستكتمه فجاء إليَّ وعرّفني به. (...) ومع ذلك فهو كان رئيس الديار المصرية وجاهًا وشكلًا وإحسانًا ونفعًا للناس، يحسن ألى الغرباء ويقضى حوائج الناس وهو عند الناس مثل من هو صاحب الديوان. ولم يزل يوقع في دست السلطان إلى أن توفي – رحمه الله.

He was influential[129] in the *dawla* of al-Nāṣir [Muḥammad], first in the farthest place, and also in the aforementioned [sultan's second] *dawla,* after the sultan's return from Karak, [but then] in the second-to-first place, although the people considered him as being in the first place and much glorified him.[130] He was in the service (*fī khidma*) of the amir Sayf al-Dīn Salār [the very powerful viceroy in al-Nāṣir Muḥammad's second reign] writing in his entourage, and he composed in the days of his viceroyalty. [Because of this,] the sultan al-Malik al-Nāṣir hated him. The *qāḍī* Shihāb al-Dīn b. Faḍl Allāh told me personally: 'the sultan told me: <<I didn't hate him because of anything, only because his master, that is Salār, was disloyal [to me], because he made [ʿAlāʾ al-Dīn] write something and he confided in him, so he came to me and told me about it.>>' [...] Despite this he was the head of the Egyptian lands in influence (*wijāhatan*), beneficence, and [in providing] welfare for the people. He did right for strangers and he took care of the affairs of the people, for he was to the people alike one who was *ṣāḥib* of the *dīwān.* He continued working in a place of honour close to the sultan until he died.[131]

Unlike the fairly brief and humble accounts about the careers of ʿAlāʾ al-Dīn's father,[132] grandfather and even his father's cousin Shāfiʿ, we are here provided with a glimpse of the competition at the highest levels. However, in the end, although ʿAlāʾ al-Dīn struggled, he was still relatively successful in maintaining his position, even if he never formally made it to the highest position in the chancery. He was also lucky to only be held back from attaining the highest point of the hierarchy and not being shifted around from department to department like many of his peers. The account does highlight the ways in which a *kātib* had to navigate the uncertain political waters by serving powerful men whose position of power could very quickly change. By serving Salār, who fell into disfavour after al-Nāṣir's return to power in 710/1310, ʿAlāʾ al-Dīn

[129] On this term "*wājiha*", see Eychenne, *Liens personnels*, 38-39.
[130] I assume these "places" refer to chancery hierarchy and have translated accordingly.
[131] Al-Ṣafadī, *al-Wāfī bi-l-wafāyāt*, 22:36.
[132] Al-Ṣafadī does mention a few anecdotes about Fatḥ al-Dīn's experiences as *kātib* in relation to other powerful figures, but, unlike his son, he does not seem to have been in any danger of losing his position at any point. *Al-Wāfī bi-l-wafāyāt,* 3:291

made a choice that seemed logical in the early years of the eighth / fourteenth century, but which turned out to be a wrong bet when the sultan asserted his personal authority in his third reign.

As noted above, Ibn ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir and especially Shāfiʿ b. ʿAlī had strong relations with Balabān al-Rūmī, Baybars' *dawādār*. Shāfiʿ's younger contemporary Abū Bakr b. al-Dawādārī (d. 741 / 1341), who composed a nine-volume world history which I will refer to a number of times below, also extensively stressed his connection to Balabān by way of his father ʿAbdallāh. For example on the title page of the eighth volume of this text he refers to his father as one "who was known as al-Dawādārī. deriving his name (*intisāban*) from the service of the late amir Sayf al-Dīn Balabān al-Rūmī al-Dawādār al-Ẓāhirī".[133] Neither of our authors tell us a great deal about him, but other sources show that Balabān was in fact not an easy patron. Ibn al-Ṣuqāʿī and al-Yūnīnī both relate how he harshly reprimanded two Damascene *kuttāb* who had neglected to send him their accounts for seven years. When they were not able to produce the totality of the accounts on the day after his arrival to Damascus – he was passing through upon a return journey from Tripoli where he had just visited as messenger (*tawajjaha rasūlān ilā Ṭarābulus*) -- he had them beaten and cut their noses and beards off.[134] Balabān al-Rūmī's centrality to Baybars' *dawla* would remain well known in later periods. The much later historian Ibn Taghrī-Birdī (d. 874 / 1470) for example writes that after the death of Ḥusām al-Dīn Lājīn al-Aydamurī he took over the management of state affairs by himself, and that there was as such no need for a vizier.[135] Although this assessment is incorrect, considering the wealth of contemporary information we have about Baybars' powerful vizier Bahāʾ al-Dīn b. Ḥinnā, it does showcase the posterior image of Balabān's towering influence.

The importance of figures such as Balabān highlights the relation between scribes and amirs which Eychenne puts central in his study of social relations in the period. All of our sources always extensively and often very exactly note the names of the various amirs participating in all manner of activities, so it is clear they acknowledged the importance of these agents in political matters. However, as we shall see below, there is also an element of competition at play in that relation when our authors subtly argue for the primacy of the chancery over the military institution by referring to or even employing the ancient literary tradition of debates between pen and sword.

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[133] Ibn al-Dawādārī, *Kanz al-durar wa-jāmiʿ al-ghurar, vol. 8: al-Durra al-zakiyya fī akhbār al-dawla l-turkiyya,* eds. U. Haarmann, (Cairo-Freiburg: Issa el-Baby el-Halaby & co. - Schwarz, 1971), 1.
[134] Eychenne, *Liens personnels,* 65-66. The mission to Tripoli may be the same one as the one in which Shāfiʿ declined to participate (see 2.3.3. above). This anecdote makes our author's refusal all the more remarkable.
[135] Ibn Taghrī-Birdī, *al-Nujūm al-zāira fī mulūk Miṣr wa-l-Qāhira,* ed. Muḥammad Ḥusayn Shams al-Dīn (Beirut: Dār al-kutub al-ʿilmiyya, 1992), vol. 7:296.

Conclusion

The preceding sections have sought to sketch an adequate contextual framework of reference by which we may understand both the factual information in the texts under study as well as some of the meanings of the discourses employed. It has tried to define more exactly how we should conceptualise the two key institutions "court" and "chancery" in which our authors were active. I have stressed the fact that both of these should be understood within the logic of social practice. Court was essentially defined by the ruler's presence, and the status of a person at his court was dependent on his specific relation to the sultan, despite the existence of various formal state functions, even at those times when the sultan was merely a symbolical figurehead. Within the chancery too, we have seen that the specific designations of the functions of *kuttāb* and their relations to each other were changeable across time, although certain normative practices and understandings emerged and were meaningful to our authors. The last subsection of this chapter has tried to understand the workings of social practice within these contexts better by looking at the life stories of members of the family of our authors as well as a number of related, contemporary agents. As I argue with Bourdieu that literary discourses always function within a social logic, it is important to be aware of the direct social contexts in which our authors were active, especially if we wish to formulate ideas about the communicative intentions of literary discourse, and of texts as forms of social practice.

However, literary discourse adheres just as much to an internal literary habitus and will refer to or embed itself within normative discourses on various forms of linguistic expression. The final chapter of this first part will deal more fully with the connotations of literary communication for these texts and broaden the lens of social practice to the literary field.

Chapter 3
Poetry, *inshāʾ*, and *sīra*: Defining the Literary Field

بلغني (...) أنّ فلانًا غضّ منّي كل غضّ الجنى * وأنه عبث بي
عبث الأيام بالمنى * وأنّه ردّني إلى أر ذل العمر في الاطراح *
وغلق في وجه تنجيحي أبواب النجاح * وزعم أن إناء أناتى غير
مُفعم * وبغاء مجدي غير مُحكم * وجواد إجادتي غير مُلجم *
وأنّ ميلاد مجدي حديث * وسبب سعدي رثيث * (...)

وإذ أتتك مذمتي من ناقص فهي الشهادة لي بأنّي كامل

[Word] has reached me [...] that a certain person detracted my reputation, wishing for the succulence of an entire harvest, that he mocked me with a joke on the days of fate, opposing me until I would repudiate life by neglecting [to respond]; [as such] he successfully closed the gates of accomplishment, [for] he [must have] believed that the vessel of my ego is not overfull, the desire for my distinction not sturdy, the generosity of my performance not harnessed, that the birth of my distinction is recent, and the tent rope of my good fortune shabby [...]

If my blame makes you imperfect,
then it is a testimonial to my perfection.[1]

So begins one of the most widely circulated texts written by Ibn ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir, the *risāla* I referred to above as the earliest known text written by our author (see 2.3.3.). This famed example of what Everett Rowson has called "rhetorical epistolography" is concerned with setting straight an unnamed Shiite critic who called our author out "for

[1] Al-Ṣafadī, *Tamām al-mutūn,* 404-405.

having shown himself excessively humble in a scholarly gathering".[2] The original remark is only alluded to it in the text, but it is clear that Ibn ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir grasped the occasion to showcase how well he could suppress this humbleness if needed. In excellent *inshāʾ* fashion, masterfully interweaving prose and poetry, the argument is driven home by a quoted line from al-Mutanabbī, the notoriously arrogant fourth / tenth-century poet whom our author would go on to quote extensively in his *sīra* of Baybars (see 6.2.2.).

I have quoted these lines here because they are a nice illustration of the dynamics of literary production and performance in the medieval Islamic World, within which the *sīra*'s written by our authors should be partly understood. Muhsin al-Musawi has for example argued that "the large-scale and diverse cultural production in Arabic in the postclassical era (approximately the twelfth through the eighteenth centuries) was the outcome of an active sphere of *discussion and disputation* spanning the entire medieval Muslim World".[3] Al-Musawi participates in a scholarly upsurge of recent decades in studies of the long neglected literary legacy of the later Islamic periods, arguing against a still quite common idea of decline and scholastic decadence. For Egypt and Syria in the later Middle Ages, this has meant that important figures such as Ibn Nubāta al-Miṣrī, Ibn Abī Ḥajala, al-Ṣafadī, and a host of others are now rightly considered masters of Arabic literature by a growing readership. One of the most important contributors to this reassessment of "Mamluk" literature has been Thomas Bauer, who also introduced a number of conceptualisations to make sense of the specific qualities of literature in this time. The most important of these for my concerns is the concept of "literary communication", the idea that literature was not only meant to perform a person's mastery of stylistic forms, but was also as it were meant to open debates, to spark responses, to engender dialogue.[4] In illustrating the workings of this communication, Bauer himself discusses a number of poems that formed part of such dialogues, although it is often not easy to reconstruct both sides of the debate. Elsewhere, he discusses how several authors composed hunting epistles, that all in one way or another engaged with a primary text and with each other.[5] Muhsin al-Musawi's evaluation goes even further, opening up the geographical and chronological framework to evaluate literary

[2] Rowson, "An Alexandrian Age", 108-109. This is one of the few examples of *inshāʾ* writing by one of our authors which is not *dīwāniyya,* on which see below in 3.2.
[3] Muhsin al-Musawi, *The Medieval Islamic Republic of Arabic Letters: Arabic Knowledge Construction* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2015), 1. Italics mine.
[4] Bauer, "Mamluk Literature as a Means of Communication", 24-25. Literary communication understands literary texts in a continuum with ordinary, or "pragmatic" communication, but distinguished by "some sort of aesthetic benefit" and a "convention of polyvalence", that is, their possibility to speak to and engender disparate reactions with different audiences across time and space. Bauer has taken these conceptualisations of communication from the German philosopher and communication scientist Siegfried J. Schmidt.
[5] Bauer, "The Dawadar's Hunting Party."

exchange across vast tracts of space and time. One example he keeps returning to, is the so-called *Qaṣīdat al-burda,* or "Mantle ode", a poem by al-Būṣīrī (d. 696 / 1294), a sufi shaykh who lived contemporaneously to our authors, which sparked an explosion of commentaries and responses, and ended up essentially constituting a genre in itself.[6] Another example he engages with throughout the book is that of rhetorics, a vastly underestimated domain of intellectual endeavour in pre-modern Arabic that in one way or another influenced almost all other areas of thought.[7]

These theoretisations of literature may be brought into dialogue with Pierre Bourdieu's definition of the literary field as:

> un champ de forces agissant sur tous ceux qui y entrent, et de manière différentielle selon la position qu'ils y occupent [...] en même temps qu'un champ de luttes de concurrences qui tendent à conserver ou à transformer ce champ de forces.[8]

Bourdieu thus conceives of the literary field and the cultural expressions produced within its framework, as adhering to a social logic, which generates and reproduces the stakes of literary discourse and performance, which are either adhered to (and thus conserved) or actively transformed by authors participating within its logic. While Bourdieu tends to stress the "struggle" bit of his theoretical framework in his discussions, a field is essentially about agents' *interactions,* which may be of several kinds. The types of literary communication and performance discussed by al-Musawi and Bauer can in fact be seen as engagements with the literary field and as position takings to negotiate social status by way of literary performance of the agent's mastery of cultural capital.

The following sections will develop the implications of this theoretical perspective for our authors. A first will deal with literary communication in a quite literal sense, by evaluating those types of discourses that are unambiguously seen as literary, that is the poetical (and to a lesser degree prose) exchanges in which our authors were involved. This first part will be closest to Bourdieu's understanding of the field as a set of relations, whereas the following two sections will be more concerned with defining the habitus and the types of capital applied within that field: that is, it will give background

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[6] See also S.P. Stetkevych, *The Mantle Odes: Arabic Praise Poems to the Prophet Muhammad* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2010).

[7] The rhetorical (and poetical) tradition and knack for ambivalence was also engaged with at length by Thomas Bauer in the seventh chapter of his *Die Kultur der Ambiguität: Eine andere Geschichte des Islams* (Berlin: Verlag der Weltreligionen, 2011), 224-267.

[8] Bourdieu, "Le champ littéraire", 4-5. Note that Bourdieu already compares his concept of literary field to the "Republic of Letters" in its Enlightenment era formulation by Pierre Bayle (d. 1706).

about the forms of writing engaged with and important for the eventual composition of the *sīra*'s. The first of these is the practice of *inshāʾ*, which I will approach in the second section, both as a "genre" and as a style of writing. The third and last section will discuss the role of historiography in our authors' texts and the ways in which it too may be considered to work as literary communication. I will first give some background on historiography and the ways in which the term *sīra* was significant in that setting, and then engage with the scholarly concept of "Literarisierung" and the implications of narrative readings of history. Lastly I will problematise the "courtly" nature of this historiography by trying to evaluate courtly literary production and the position of our sources within that production. This section will eventually close on some perspectives on how we may understand all these practices as complex forms of literary communication and engagements with the literary field.

3.1 Literary Communication

Our authors engaged thoroughly in the type of literary communication discussed by Bauer – that is, the writing of poetry and prose as an inherently responsive undertaking, as a literary exchange. Poems may have been written for a specific occasion, but the fact that they were reproduced by later authors who compiled these exchanges highlights their "polyvalence" and resignification across time and space.[9] I have above already mentioned Ibn ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir's exchange of poems with the Damascene *kātib al-darj* Kamāl al-Dīn b. al-ʿAṭṭār, but several more examples can be found both in biographical literature of the period and even in the *sīra*'s themselves. I will discuss the latter in more detail in Part Two of this dissertation, so suffice it here to say that our authors, when they included poems or letters by other authors than themselves they often did so very consciously, either because they resonated with the narrative, or because our authors would use them to write their own spin-offs. The *sīra*'s as such thus clearly participated in the late medieval arena of literary communication, but from other sources we can gather that our authors also did so in a variety of other contexts.

To reconstruct these dynamics I have mostly made use of a number of biographical dictionaries – especially al-Ṣafadī's – and obituaries sections in annalistic chronicles. I have not closely analysed the contents of the large number of poems attributed to Ibn ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir in various biographical dictionaries and in his *dīwān* if they were not

[9] Bauer, "Mamluk Literature as a Means of Communication", 25.

linked to specific dedicatees. Studying all these poems is a worthwhile effort in itself and may lead to an even larger network, as the names of dedicatees may have been woven into the poetical language, but for pragmatic reasons I have here only looked at those poems that were specifically attributed as being sent to or received from specific agents. As above in section 2.3.1., I have visualized these in a network of literary exchange. To do so, however, I have limited myself only to those agents who are specifically named as exchanging poetry or, more rarely, prose with our authors or other relevant agents. It should be stressed that this is a visualisation in very broad strokes, based on those entries in biographical dictionaries I will refer to in the notes below. A much more elaborate and complex reconstruction is possible, but lies beyond the scope of this dissertation.

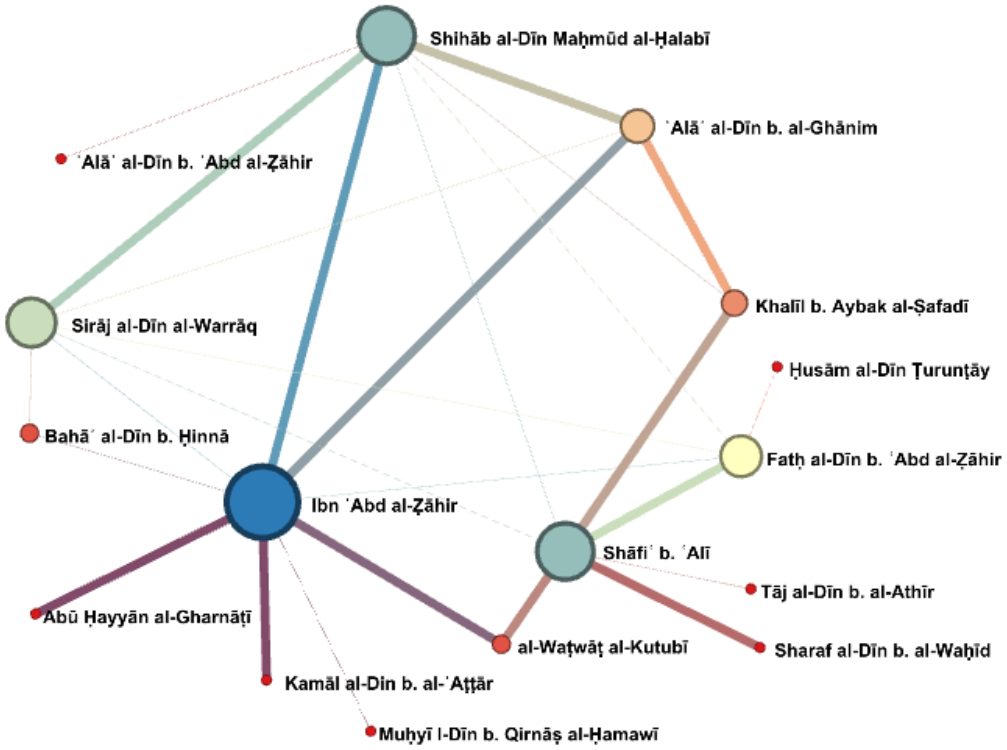

Figure 3: Literary communication of the Bānū ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir and related agents[10]

When looking at the various poems and prose texts addressed to specific persons, a large-scale network of *udabāʾ* reading and reacting to each other's works emerges. That both our authors as well as Fatḥ al-Dīn b. ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir emerge as central nodes is of

[10] A thin edge means one-sided communication, a thick edge denotes reciprocal communication, i.e. an actual exchange of poetry or prose by two authors. The largeness and colour of the nodes are defined by the amount of edges they are connected to.

course almost self-evident considering the nature of the source material whence I lifted this information, but a few other notable figures also emerge as important nodes: the earlier mentioned Shihāb al-Dīn Maḥmūd al-Ḥalabī, the famous *adīb* Sirāj al-Dīn al-Warrāq, whom Ibn ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir also quotes once in *Rawḍ*,[11] ʿAlāʾ al-Dīn b. al-Ghānim, and al-Ṣafadī himself.[12] Two of these, as well as Ibn ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir himself are explicitly named by al-Ṣafadī as participating in literary exchanges in al-Ṣafadī's *tarjama* of Ibn al-Ghānim:

> وبين الشيخ علاء الدين وبين القاضي محيي الدين بن عبد الظاهر وبين الشهاب محمود وغيره من أهل عصره محاورات ومكاتبات على عادة الأدباء مليحة.
>
> between the shaykh ʿAlāʾ al-Dīn [b. al-Ghānim], the *qāḍī* Muḥyī al-Dīn b. ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir and al-Shihāb Maḥmūd and other people of the age there were beautiful debates and the usual exchange of correspondence between *udabāʾ*.[13]

Al-Ṣafadī thus explicitly refers to literary communication, which was clearly not only appreciated by those participating in it, but also by external observers, like the connoisseur al-Ṣafadī. That the exchange between Ibn ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir and Shihāb al-Dīn, who was, like Ibn ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir himself, frequently compared to al-Qāḍī l-Fāḍil,[14] was fruitful is stressed even more by a short piece Ibn Taghrī-Birdī quotes from a work of history (*tārīkh*) written by Shihāb al-Dīn himself, presumably from a *tarjama* about Ibn ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir. Here, Shihāb al-Dīn confirms his personal correspondence with Ibn ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir:

> كتبتُ منه كثيرًا وسمعتُ منه كثيرًا من لفظه وبيني وبينه مكاتبات بالشعر من قصائد وألغاز وغير ذلك.
>
> I received many letters from him, and I heard a lot of his [expressions] from him personally (*min lafẓi-hi*), and we exchanged correspondence with poetry, consisting of odes, riddles, and others.[15]

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[11] *Rawḍ*, 184-185. See for his participation in another literary context, Bauer, "The Dawādār's Hunting Party", 296.

[12] The communication between the latter two opens al-Ṣafadī's own collection of his poetic and prose exchanges, *Alḥān al-sawājiʿ bayna l-bādīʾ wa-l-murājiʿ*, ed. Ibrāhīm Ṣāliḥ (Damascus: Dār al-bashāʾir, 2004), vol. 1:42ff.

[13] Al-Ṣafadī, *Aʿyān al-aṣr*, 3:498.

[14] Musawi, "Pre-Modern Belletristic Prose", 111.

[15] Ibn Taghrī-Birdī, *al-Manhal al-ṣāfī*, 7:98.

This relationship is also evident from the relatively high amount of poetry quoted by other authors from these exchanges. One example is found in the chronicle *Durrat al-aslāk fī dawlat al-atrāk* written by Badr al-Dīn b. Ḥabīb al-Ḥalabī (d. 779 / 1377), a renowned *kātib/adīb* himself who during his youth was a student of Shihāb al-Dīn Maḥmūd and who very frequently and admiringly quotes his old master.[16] In his lemma for Ibn ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir he includes three poems: one epigram written by Ibn ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir himself, another epigram by Sirāj al-Dīn al-Warrāq, and then a relatively long poem by Shihāb al-Dīn (fifteen lines).[17]

As is evident from Ibn Ḥabīb's entry, Shihāb al-Dīn was not Ibn ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir's only correspondent. I have above already referred to the correspondence with Sirāj al-Dīn al-Warrāq, and, in chapter two, with his son and Kamāl al-Dīn b. al-ʿAṭṭār. Another interesting example where both sides of the conversation are preserved is found in al-Jazarī's *Ḥawādith al-zamān.* Here, Athīr al-Dīn Abū Ḥayyān al-Gharnāṭī, another literary heavyweight who is today mostly remembered as a commentator of the Qurʾān and an influential grammarian,[18] recounts that he wrote a *qaṣīda* in which a rare expression (*maʿnā gharīb*) was used about a person having a birthmark (*khāl*) on his nose. When reading this poem, Ibn ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir promptly wrote no less than eight replies in which he continuously flexed the meaning of the expression.[19] Al-Gharnāṭī's literary relation with Ibn ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir does not end there, for al-Jazarī mentions two poems Ibn ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir had heard from other persons and which he transmitted to al-Gharnāṭī. These poems were quite prestigious: one is by the famous *muḥaddith* Ibn al-Najjār [al-Baghdādī] (d. 643 / 1245) and the other by the renowned poet Abū al-ʿAlāʾ al-Maʿarrī (d. 449/1058).[20] Ibn ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir did not only send out poetry, he also used his mastery of prose to impress or entertain his peers, as he did with a *maqāma* which he sent to the well-attested but barely studied poet Muḥyī al-Dīn b. Qirnāṣ al-Ḥamawī (d. 675/1276 or 685/1286), a member of the prominent Āl Qirnāṣ of Hama.[21]

Shāfiʿ b. ʿAlī similarly engaged in widespread literary communication. Shihāb al-Dīn b. Faḍl Allāh al-ʿUmarī (d. 749 / 1349), a leading *kātib* himself, lists him in his monumental *Masālik al-abṣār fī l-mamālik wa-l-amṣār* as one of the most prominent Egyptian poets — interestingly, Ibn ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir does not receive a personal entry,

[16] On Ibn Ḥabīb's own literary writing, see: J. Hämeen Anttila, "The essay and debate (al-risāla and al-munāẓara)", *Arabic Literature in the Post-Classical Period*, 144.
[17] Ibn Ḥabīb, *Durrat al-aslāk fī dawlat al-Atrāk*, Universitätsbibliothek Leipzig, MS Vollers 0661, 113v-114r.
[18] S. Glazer, "Abu Ḥayyān Athīr al-Dīn Muḥammad b. Yūsuf al-Gharnāṭī", *EI2.*
[19] Al-Jazarī, *Ḥawādith al-zamān*, 1:179-181.
[20] Idem, 1:181.
[21] Al-Ṣafadī, *al-Wāfī bi-l-wafāyāt,* 17:137-141. On this poet, see Ḥusayn ʿAbd al-ʿĀl al-Luhaybī, "Shiʿr Muḥyī al-Dīn b. Qirnāṣ al-Ḥamawī: Dirāsa wa-tawthīq", *Majallat markaz dirāsāt al-Kūfa,* 31 (2013), 74-115.

neither here, nor amongst the most prominent Egyptian *kuttāb.*[22] Al-ʿUmarī quotes a number of his poems, as well as some prose text, although he assessed the latter as "the least of his craft, and the most dull of his two qualities".[23] Luckily, amongst the few prose pieces he does deem worthy to include, there is one highly interesting example in the context of literary communication, a short extract in which our author apparently opposed (*qawlu-hu muʿāriḍan*) Tāj al-Dīn b. al-Athīr, an important *kātib* in the *dīwān al-inshāʾ* during the reigns of both Baybars and Qalāwūn, whom Shāfiʿ mentions once in reverent tones in *al-Faḍl al-maʾthūr.*[24] In fact, both in the excerpt quoted by al-ʿUmarī and in the instance from *al-Faḍl al-maʾthūr*, Shāfiʿ engages in literary communication: I will return to the second example in more detail below, but the excerpt in al-ʿUmarī was a variation on themes and metaphors used by Ibn al-Athīr in an edict about the freeing of a certain unnamed person, possibly a *ḥājib.*[25] Like Ibn ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir's picking up on a rare expression in al-Gharnāṭī's poem, this example illustrates the importance of rhetorics in this type of literary communication, although in this case it was apparently less in friendly fashion, but in one of challenging the literary authority of his colleague.

Amongst Shāfiʿ's other correspondents we find once more Shihāb al-Dīn Maḥmud al-Ḥalabī, whose poem sent to Shāfiʿ is again recorded by Shihāb's faithful student Ibn Ḥabīb.[26] Perhaps the most extensive example of Shāfiʿ's literary exchanges is found in al-Ṣafadī's *tarjama* of him, where al-Ṣafadī describes visiting the blind man and engaging in a poetical exchange that consists of seven epigrams related to old age, death, and burial – one example of which was quoted at the outset of this dissertation's introduction.[27] Later, al-Ṣafadī asked him for an *ijāza* (permission) to transmit an account of his life and works from him, which he then provided. Due to this *ijāza* — dated to 729 / 1328, one year before Shāfiʿ's death, which may explain the slightly morbid topic of the epigrams — we have an extremely interesting list of works Shāfiʿ claims to have written, as well as a selection of poems he allowed al-Ṣafadī to transmit from him, one of which is also attested in his *sīra* of al-Nāṣir Muḥammad.[28]

Al-Ṣafadī also lists two poems sent to Shāfiʿ by other poets: one is by al-Sirāj al-Warrāq, whom we encountered above as one of Ibn ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir's correspondents, and indeed one of the most active poets of the period. Here, he is asking Shāfiʿ to mediate between him and his cousin Fatḥ al-Dīn b. ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir, perhaps to secure a position in

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[22] Al-ʿUmarī, *Masālik*, 19:221-226. Unlike Ibn ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir, the earlier mentioned Shihāb al-Dīn Maḥmūd al-Ḥalabī does receive a lengthy lemma as one of the most important *kuttāb*. Ibidem, 12:293-330.

[23] Ibidem, 19:224. * وهو أقلّ صناعتيه * وأكسد بضاعتيه

[24] He is included in Ibn Shaddād's list of *kuttāb* (see 2.2. above). *Faḍl,* 149.

[25] Ibidem, 19:225. Both the short pieces quoted from Shāfiʿ and Ibn al-Athīr play on the meanings of the word *ḥājib* (pl. *ḥujjāb*), and Ibn al-Athīr even seems to say that the person "was called *ḥājib*".

[26] Ibn Ḥabīb, *Tadkhirat al-nabīh,* vol. 2:209. Also in *Durrat al-aslāk*, BnF, MS Arabe 1719, 191v.

[27] Al-Ṣafadī, *Aʿyān al-aṣr*, 2:503-504.

[28] Idem, 2:506-510; Arabe 1705, 67r.

the chancery. The other correspondent is in fact Fatḥ al-Dīn himself, who writes a short poem welcoming Shāfiʿ as a guest built around intertextual references to poems by the above mentioned Abū l-ʿAlāʾ al-Maʿarrī and al-Fatḥ b. Khāqān (d. 247 / 861).[29] The close familial connection of Shāfiʿ b. ʿAlī to the main branch of the Bānū ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir is also clear from the fact that when ʿAlāʾ al-Dīn b. ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir died in 717 / 1317, Shihāb al-Dīn Maḥmūd wrote a lengthy elegy (58 lines!) for him — he had earlier written a rather long praise of ʿAlāʾ al-Dīn's garden (23 lines) — which he addressed to Shāfiʿ.[30]

An interesting case of literary communication involving Shāfiʿ is preserved in an as yet unedited anonymous text named *al-Ajwiba l-muʿtabara ʿan al-futyā al-mubtakara,* an anthology of different forms of literary communication amongst scholars throughout the Mamluk period.[31] The last two sections of this manuscript containing collections of *taqārīẓ* (s. *taqrīẓ,* literary appreciations of a book by peers, requested by the book's author, hence the common rendering as "blurb") have received some attention from Franz Rosenthal and Amilia Levanoni,[32] but the manuscript's first few folio's (the contents of which the title refers to directly) deal with a different subject matter: a letter written by the famous poet Ibn Nubāta l-Miṣrī who according to the text's introduction requested Shihāb al-Dīn b. Faḍl Allāh al-ʿUmarī to give him a position in the chancery as *kātib al-darj.* When he did not receive a reply, he requested a response ("*istaftā*") to this situation from the "people of that age" ("*ahl dhālika l-ʿaṣr"*). The compiler notes that he was (only) able to find one of these responses, written by Shāfiʿ b. ʿAlī.[33] The episode is not dated, and neither is it referred to by Thomas Bauer in his thorough overview of Ibn Nubāta l-Miṣrī's life.[34] From that overview we do learn that Ibn Nubāta only fully entered the chancery rather late in life in 743 / 1342 (although he had close links to persons in the *dīwān* of both Damascus and Cairo in the decades before that), indeed in close association with Shihāb al-Dīn b. Faḍl Allāh. However, this is more than a decade after the death of Shāfiʿ in 730/1330 so the letters must date from a period

[29] Al-Ṣafadī, *Aʿyān al-aṣr*, 2:510.
[30] Al-Ṣafadī, *Al-Wāfī bi-l-wafāyāt,* 12:39-41. The praise of the garden is on page 38. The lemma as such effectively spends more space on Shihāb al-Dīn Maḥmūd's writing than on ʿAlāʾ al-Dīn's, of whom only one *risāla* is quoted. In fact, al-Ṣafadī (probably correctly) claims that ʿAlāʾ al-Dīn did not write any poetry.
[31] Anonymous, *al-Ajwiba l-muʿtabira ʿan al-futyā al-mubtakira*, Berlin: Staatsbibliothek, Wetzstein II: 1473. The manuscript likely dates from the late fifteenth or early sixteenth century, judging by its layout and the fact that it discusses events from the early ninth / fifteenth century. I am grateful to Tarek Sabraa and Mohamad Maslouh for bringing this text to my attention. However, they did so only very late in the process of writing up this dissertation, so I have not been able to engage with this text as extensively as I would like.
[32] F. Rosenthal, "'Blurbs' (*taqrīẓ*) from Fourteenth-Century Egypt", *Oriens* 27-28 (1981), 177-196; A. Levanoni, "Sīrat al-Muʾayyad Shaykh by Ibn Nāhiḍ", in *Texts, Document and Artefacts: Islamic Studies in Honour of D.S. Richards,* ed. C.F. Robinson (Leiden: Brill, 2003), 211-232.
[33] *al-Ajwiba l-muʿtabira,* 1v-3v (Ibn Nubāta's request); 3v-4v (Shāfiʿ's response).
[34] T. Bauer, "Ibn Nubātah al-Miṣrī (686-768/1287-1366): Life and Works. Part I: The Life of Ibn Nubātah", *MSR* 12/1 (2008), 9-35. Despite the difficulty of dating the texts exactly, I would say that the letters are likely authentic, due to many oblique references to derived forms of "*Faḍl Allāh*" and "*Nubāta*" in Shāfiʿ's letter, the general stylistics of which also fit with our author's writing style.

before that. I would guess that it took place some time in the (late) 720s/1320s, when Shihāb al-Dīn b. Faḍl Allāh did indeed take over a leading role in the Damascus chancery. For our purposes the case is mostly interesting for the fact that this letter was certainly written at a time when Shāfiʿ did not hold an actual position in the chancery and likely also when he had no familial connections to the institution anymore. Nevertheless, his earlier experience in that context, and his family relation to illustrious leading figures of the institution likely allowed him to formulate his opinion here with some authority and above all in the appropriate literary style. This particular exchange is not included in my visualisation above as it came to my attention too late, and because the extent to which both authors knew each other and sent their texts directly to each other is unclear.

While all of the above examples are "positive" exchanges, in which authors praised and commended each other at least ostensibly, there are also less pretty sides of literary communication which we also came across at the outset of this chapter with Ibn ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir's eloquent rebuttal of a critic. We also have evidence of such a case for Shāfiʿ, in which it is related that some time after he had become blind he consulted and praised "something of the *adab*" of the *kātib* Sharaf al-Dīn b. al-Waḥīd (d. 711/1311) in an epigram, upon which the latter replied with a four-line poem ending on the famous line of al-Mutanabbī quoted at the outset of Chapter 2: "I am the one whose *adab* the blind sees". For understandable reasons, Shāfiʿ is said to have taken this as an insult and replied with a nine-line poem, of which the first two lines are:

نعم نظرت ولكن لم أجد أدباً　　يا مَن غدا واحداً في قلة الأدب
جازيت مدحي وتقريظي بمعيرة　　والعيب في الرأس دون العيب في الذنب

Yes I looked but I did not find [true] literature (*adab*)
oh you who comes and goes as one lacking manners (*adab*)
you repaid my praise and acclaim with reproach
[but] the blemish in the head is inferior to the blemish in the misdeed![35]

This is only a cursory overview and I have for pragmatic reasons chosen not to delve too deeply into the biographies of Fatḥ al-Dīn and ʿAlāʾ al-Dīn b. ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir, but what emerges from the examples I have cited is indeed a wide-ranging literary network, in which *udabāʾ* of various backgrounds communicated in several domains: they wrote

[35] al-Ṣafadī, *al-Wāfī bi-l-wafāyāt,* vol 3:125-126. The exchange is summarised by al-ʿAynī, *ʿIqd al-jumān fī tārīkh ahl al-zamān,* ed. Maḥmūd Rizq Maḥmūd (Cairo: Maṭbaʿat Dār al-kutub, 2009), vol. 5:317 who only quotes these first two lines, and replaces the first half of the second line with this variant:
عيّرتني بعمى أصبحت تذكره - "You reproached me by mentioning that I became blind"

poetry for each other, visited each other to exchange the poetry they wrote themselves or had heard from others, they wrote praises for or sometimes denigrations of each other for various reasons, but perhaps mostly to engage in personal relations that might enable social advancement. It has in no way been my attention to claim that these networks should be seen as separate to the networks of learning (2.3.2.) and the professional contexts (engaged with in 2.3.3 and 2.3.4) in which our authors were active. Rather, it should have become clear that all these networks overlapped considerably, with agents such as for example Shihāb al-Dīn Maḥmūd reappearing in various contexts.

3.2 *Inshāʾ*

Biographers were keen to anthologize the poetical and, to a lesser degree, artful prose texts written by authors, but while these writings were widely appreciated, they did not constitute the professional core business of *kuttāb.* That honour must be accorded foremost to epistolography, the various types of letters and official documents our authors composed in the service of a sultan. And indeed, as we shall see below, our authors' roles in composing such documents is amply stressed throughout the *sīra*'s, and is one of the primary domains in which they performed their claims to being an ideal *kātib.* To understand these performative claims, however, it is important to understand the practices of epistolography of the period.

Epistolography in the medieval Arabic world is often denoted as *inshāʾ* (another oft-used term is *tarassul*), which as we have seen literally denoted "composition" but came to denote both the practice of epistolography and the specific language register used: an artful and complex interweaving of prose and poetry, often famous one-liners that were apposite to the subject at hand. As Jo Van Steenbergen claimed, it was "part of the increasing social importance of literature, having become a wide-ranging skill that was a defining aspect of elite identities and a predominant channel for verbal elite communications".[36] John Wansbrough has even argued that these chancery practices should be understood within vast *longue durée* processes of Mediterranean trade from the Bronze Age up to the tenth/sixteenth century, and that they were part of a shared "lingua franca" of diplomatic discourse, "a linguistic subsystem that informed and effected the major channel of international relations" in which all effectively used

[36] Van Steenbergen, "Qalāwūnid Discourse", 19.

languages participated.[37] Even if we limit ourselves to the Arabic tradition, it is indeed clear that by the Mamluk period, epistolography was a well-established practice with its own rules and conventions. In general we may also observe that it is one the best attested "genres" of Arabic literature, not in the least through the massive chancery manuals of such persons as al-ʿUmarī and al-Qalqashandī referred to above, but also through specific letter collections. An example of the latter is a slim volume compiled by Ibn ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir himself devoted to letters written by his venerable predecessor al-Qāḍī l-Fāḍil.

Insofar as various types of epistolography are relevant, I will refer to them below when they appear, but one major formal subdivision may be noted here, as it has been quite regularly reiterated by scholars: the division between *ikhwāniyyāt* and *dīwāniyyāt,* that is letters meant for communication between "friends" ("*ikhwān"* means "brothers"), acquaintances, or for personal reasons, and letters which were written in and for the official context of the chancery, that is, the *dīwān.*[38] This presupposes a strict division between personal and professional epistolography, but as Muhsin al-Musawi rightly notes, this distinction was "merely one of convenience," as stylistically they tended to bleed into each other.[39] as far as the texts within our corpus – i.e. quoted in the *sīra*'s – are concerned, most texts were clearly *dīwāniyyāt* (with one particularly complex exception to be discussed in 6.2.1.2.), although a few letters written by Ibn ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir quoted in other works would fit the *ikhwāniyyāt* rubric more easily.[40]

The fact that Muhsin al-Musawi refers to the *sīra*'s as "a genre which, almost *ipso facto,* sits at the very centre of the tradition of belles-lettres" has much to do with the fact that the language register employed was so thoroughly related to *inshāʾ* practices.[41] This is foremost visible in the heavy reliance on *sajʿ* – that is, it will be remembered, cadenced rhyming prose – which had already been the norm in chancery writing for centuries, but also became widely propounded in other texts unrelated to correspondence writing around the turn of the (common era) millennium. One of the greatest writers to extensively use the stylistic, Badīʿ al-Zamān al-Hamadhānī (d. 395 / 1109), even made it into an innovative and widely influential new genre, the *maqāma,* which was further perfected by his student al-Ḥarīrī (d. 516 / 1122). The latter's

[37] J. Wansbrough, *Lingua Franca in the Mediterranean* (Richmond: Curzon Press, 1996), 7.
[38] The best overview and discussion of various practices of epistolography in the period is A. Gully's *The Culture of Letter-Writing.*
[39] Al-Musawi, "Pre-Modern Belletristic Prose", 111. On *ikhwāniyya* letters in earlier periods, see: Naaman, *Literature and the Islamic Court,* 146-147.
[40] For a discussion of the diplomatic formalities of *ikhwāniyyāt* letters applied to two specific examples, see F. Bauden, "Maqriziana XIII: An Exchange of Correspondence between al-Maqrīzī and al-Qalqashandī", in *Developing Perspectives in Mamluk History: Essays in Honor of Amalia Levanoni,* ed. Y. Ben-Bassat (Leiden: Brill, 2017), 207-210.
[41] Muhsin al-Musawi, "Pre-Modern Belletristic Prose", 123-124.

maqāmāt continued to be extensively copied and commented upon during our authors' times.[42] The genre remained hugely popular: to give only three pertinent examples among many: one of Ibn ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir's most celebrated writings was a *maqāma,*[43] Shāfiʿ lists a collection of *maqāmāt* among his writings in the *ijāza* given to al-Ṣafadī,[44] and a *maqāma* on the art of *kitāba,* that is official writing, more or less synonymous with *inshāʾ*, was also written by al-Qalqashandī.[45] Slightly preceding these innovations, *inshāʾ* writing started to become more common in the context of historical writing as well. Our authors are good examples of the style's appearance in Arabic historical writing as well, in addition to works of al-ʿUtbī and ʿImād al-Dīn al-Kātib al-Iṣfahānī, which I will return to in 3.3.2.

Despite its contemporary stylistic ubiquity, modern scholars of medieval Islamic history have tended to look down on the florid style of writing, and have seen its major stylistic vehicle *sajʿ* as a road-block on the way to reconstructing historical events and authorial positions.[46] While most modern scholars would not go so far as to deride *sajʿ* entirely anymore, only few have looked closely at the specific guises in which this kind of prose is used by some historians to convey their accounts. While the tension between a so-called "simple style" and an "artificial" or "ornate style" has been explored to some degree in the context of Persian historiography, the rhetorical qualities of Arabic historical writing have only been studied in very limited fashion.[47] One major aspect of this seems to be that the style is still considered to be "difficult" or even incomprehensible by modern readers. However, as Henri Massé has rightly noted, in ʿImād al-Dīn al-Iṣfahānī's *al-Fatḥ al-Qussī,* one of the most densely written Arabic texts in the Middle Period, the use of rhyme does not necessarily complicate the reading and the

[42] Al-Musawi, "Pre-Modern Belletristic Prose", 114-117; M.L. Keegan, "Commentators, Collators, and Copyists: Interpreting Manuscript Variation in the Exordium of Al-Ḥarīrī's Maqāmāt", *Arabic Humanities, Islamic Thought: Essays in Honor of Everett K. Rowson,* ed. Joseph Lowry & Shawkat Toorawa (Leiden: Brill, 2017), 307-308.
[43] Quoted in full by al-Ṣafadī in *al-Wāfī bi-l-wafāyāt,* 17:137-141.
[44] Named simply "*al-Maqāmāt al-Nāṣiriyya",* in which the latter term probably refers to his kunya Nāṣir al-Dīn. Al-Ṣafadī, *Aʿyān al-aṣr*, 507.
[45] Discussed in: C.E. Bosworth, "A 'maqāma' on Secretaryship: al-Qalqashandī's 'al-Kawākib al-durriyya fī'l-manāqib al-Badriyya'", *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies*, 27, 2 (1964), 291-298; also more extensively in M.J. al-Musawi, "Vindicating a Profession or a Personal Career? Al-Qalqashandī's *Maqāmah* in Context", *MSR* 7/1 (2003), 111-135.
[46] For a classic derogatory attitude towards rhymed prose, see F. Rosenthal, *A History of Muslim Historiography* (Leiden: Brill, 1968), 176-179. He concludes: "All in all, whatever attractiveness the use of rhymed prose may have added to historical literature in the eyes of the cultured reader, it made no contribution to a deepening of the historical understanding, nor did it produce an essentially new form of historical presentation."
[47] Julie S. Meisami, "History as Literature", in *A History of Persian Literatuere X: Persian Historiography,* ed. Charles Melville & Ehsan Yarshater, (New York: I.B. Tauris, 2012), 19-34. Lutz Richter-Bernburg has admiringly evaluated the rhetorics of excerpts from ʿImād al-Dīn al-Iṣfahānī's *al-Barq al-Shāmī* and earlier artfully written historical texts by al-Ṣābī, al-ʿUtbī, and al-Qāḍī l-Fāḍil that are commonly cited as having been his inspirations in *Der Syrische Blitz: Saladins Sekretär zwischen Selbstdarstellung und Geschichtsschreibung* (Stuttgart: Steiner, 1998), 137-189.

historical narrative is often still easy to follow.[48] The corpus of *sīra*'s represents a highly interesting set of texts in which these qualities and their textual functions may also be evaluated. While not per se representative of Arabic historical writing of the period at large, it does form a cohesive set of texts that is at least representative of a distinctive *type* of history writing. In Part Two of this dissertation I will regularly discuss the ways in which stylistics are used as important conveyors of meaning.

One of the few scholars who has devoted somewhat more extensive attention to the stylistics of *inshāʾ* writing and its influence on the historiographical form used by our authors is Anne Troadec, who rightly claimed that such language use has a performative aspect to it. However, she limited this performative layer to the actual staging of a text's contents in the context of oral communication, linked to the basic idea of the text serving a legitimising end. Authors would embed sultanic feats into a timeless narration of the Islamic past ("the past in service of the present"), and perform it in a public courtly setting by reading their texts out loud.[49] This is a rather reductive interpretation of performance, especially since *sajʿ* is also performative on another, more broadly applicable level, namely as a display of prowess in a style of writing held to be the ultimate form of written expression in secretarial milieus. I will argue throughout this dissertation that these texts were performative in the sense that they perform a *kātib*'s mastery of specific text genres of high literary technicality, and not because they were literally performed at court.[50] I will return to this problem of performance and court readings in Part Three.

"The culture of letter-writing", to quote Adrian Gully, profoundly influenced the linguistic registers employed by our authors in all domains, not all of which were as strictly related to their professional occupation as *kuttāb.* As we shall see below, letters and other official documents which did originate from or were at least related to the professional practice of *inshāʾ* took up important positions in the *sīra*'s, and although these were often clearly demarcated and signposted in their textual surroundings, the section boundaries do not divide the language registers, which work rather according to an internal logic across the texts. My analysis in Chapter 6 will discuss a number of examples in which we may see these compiled documents and their textual contexts interacting.

[48] Massé, *La conquête de la Syrie et de la Palestine,* x.
[49] Troadec, "Les Mamelouks dans l'espace syrien", 82-84.
[50] For a similar argument, see E. Naaman, *Literature and the Islamic Court*, 26, where he claims that al-Qāḍī l-Jurjānī's writing in the ornate *inshāʾ* style in his *Tahdhīb al-tārīkh* was "valued not only for its historical content but equally for its rhetorical merits. [His introduction] aimed at illustrating his excellent prose style, and hence it is a manifestation, or position-taking in the terms of Pierre Bourdieu, in the literary field."

3.3 Historiography: Literarisierung, Narrative, and Meaning

Although poetry and *inshāʾ* writing were thus major fields of expression for our authors, it still remains the case that the *sīra*'s are fundamentally historical texts dealing with the life and actions of a ruler. That they did so in stylistic registers that adhere more to those of literature was in fact not at all unprecedented, and a scholarly debate has been ongoing about the various literary qualities of historiography in the period. The following three subsections will deal with a number of questions relating to the position of historiography in general and the ways in which our *sīra's* may be seen as historiographical in particular. A first section offers some general perspectives on historiography during the period, as well as a discussion of the term *sīra* and its historiographical connotations, as a background for the discussion in Chapter 4 on how our authors employed the term. A second section then moves on to the ongoing scholarly discussions concerning the "literariness" of the period's historiography, which is highly relevant for the corpus under study. The last section then turns to the specific "courtliness" of these *sīra*'s, embedding these texts within broader practices of courtly literary production.

3.3.1 Early Mamluk Historiography and *sīra*: the importance of the contemporary

By the second half of the seventh / thirteenth century, historiography was a well-established genre of writing in Arabic. Although its status within the wider field of textual knowledge (re)production remains a matter of debate, some historiographical works were without a doubt seen as central to the textual tradition. One famous anecdote for example tells about a Fatimid library containing no less than 1220 copies of Abū Jaʿfar al-Ṭabarī's (d. 310/923) monumental *Tārīkh al-rusul wa-l-mulūk,* which is presumably not only illustrative of narrative practices of great exaggeration but also of the towering status of that foundational text.[51] In the centuries following its initial composition, Ṭabarī's large scale annalistic format would in fact prove deeply influential, although a distinctive shift towards a stronger focus on contemporary and local events did unmistakably take place in the later Middle Period.[52] This development pushed Tarif Khalidi to argue that we can see a veritable "epistemic category" of

[51] Robinson, *Islamic Historiography,* 111.
[52] T. Khalidi, *Arabic Historical Thought in the Classical Period* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 184-188. See also Robinson, *Islamic Historiography,* 100-102.

"*siyāsa*", of "politics", emerging in the Middle Period, culminating in what he called "the imperial bureaucratic chronicle". In that approach "historical knowledge is all knowledge that bears a direct or indirect relationship to the governance of *mamalik,* or feudal principalities", in which "the connection between power and knowledge [...] was pronounced".[53] Khalidi's evaluation of these epistemic categories has rightly been criticised for being too sweeping,[54] but the idea that there was an important entanglement of rulers and historians has had wide currency, and has been linked to the growing stress on contemporary events. Both elements are of course relevant for our purposes for these texts too were preoccupied with very recent events and accorded the relationship between the author and the ruling elites a central place in the work. They furthermore took the annalistic format as their basic narrative framework – although we shall see that they did sometimes deviate from this norm where they considered it appropriate.

In many ways the texts in our corpus thus fit comfortably within the contemporary traditions of writing historiography, but at the same time they themselves did not seem to have considered themselves primarily as historians, but as writers of *sīra*. The distinction may be seen as one of semantics, but it is clear that for our authors this was a meaningful signifier. If we want to adequately understand this, some background on the networks of meaning attached to the term *sīra* is necessary. The Arabic word *sīra* derives from the root letters *s-y-r*. For the famous lexicographer Ibn Manẓūr (d. 711 / 1311-2), a contemporary and possibly even a colleague of Ibn ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir and Shāfiʿ b. ʿAlī, its primary signification was "going", "*al-dhahāb*",[55] while the derived form *sīra* had a primary meaning of "*ṭarīqa*", that is, "a way of going", or even simply, "a road".[56] The later lexicographer Muḥammad Murtaḍā al-Zabīdī (d. 1205 / 1791) starts out similarly in his definition but adds the important derived meaning of *ṭarīqa* as specific *person's* way of going, i.e. a way of doing things, with the connotation of being exemplary. He also gives *sunna* as a metaphorical synonym (*min al-majāz*).[57] This word means "habitual practice" but has very important Prophetic connotations as it denotes the way in which the Prophet and his Companions went about things, which should be taken as a reference for contemporary muslims (hence "Sunnism"). We can see in these specifications the origins of the derived meanings "behaviour" and "conduct", and a suggestion of the common idea of *sīra* as a record of history that offers an exemplary

[53] Khalidi, *Arabic Historical Thought in the Classical Period,* 183-184.
[54] J.S. Meisami, "Review of *Arabic Historical Thought in the Classical Period*", *JAOS* 116/2 (1996), 309-313.
[55] Muḥammad b. Mukarram b. Manẓūr, *Lisān al-ʿarab,* 2169. On the possible identification of Ibn Manẓūr as the *kātib* Ibn al-Mukarram who was active in Qalāwūn's chancery and whom we will come across a few more times, see: J.W. Fück, "Ibn Manẓūr", *EI2.*
[56] Ibn Manẓūr, *Lisān al-ʿarab*, 2170.
[57] Murtaḍā al-Zabīdī, *Tāj al-ʿarūs min jawhar al-qāmūs,* 12:116-117.

path to be followed.[58] Although neither Ibn Manẓūr nor Murtaḍā explicitly highlighted these meanings,[59] the term did become already very early on associated with historical reports (*akhbār*), specifically those dealing with the life and actions of the Prophet Muḥammad — especially his battles, or *maghāzī,* a term that seems to have been used interchangeably with *sīra* for some time. As such, *al-sīra l-nabawiyya* came to be a genre that remained intimately linked to the collection and study of *ḥadīth,* which is often seen as constituting the very roots of Arabic historiography.[60] Already early on, however, the term would also be associated with the lives of kings and great men, *siyar al-mulūk,* especially those works that had Persian kings as their subject.[61] For Chase Robinson, "biography" as English equivalent of *sīra* is one of three "types" of Arabic-Islamic historiography, and although it shares many aspects with "chronography" and "prosopography" it differs from both these types in its sustained focus on the life of one person and his (or extremely rarely, her) actions, which are presented in exemplary fashion.[62] Similarly, Dwight Reynolds renders *sīra* as "exemplary life story".[63] In the centuries following the lives of our authors, the term would also grow to great significance because of its use to denote popular epics that were predominantly orally performed, such as the *Sīrat Baybars.*[64]

Despite excellent work done on the Prophetic *sīra* by Wim Raven, Uri Rubin[65] and others, as well as a growing list of studies on the popular *sīra*'s of the late medieval and early modern period, an in-depth study of the many changing meanings attached to the term *sīra* beyond that relatively narrow focus remains wanting. As such it is somewhat unclear how exactly it evolved throughout the centuries to eventually be taken up by our authors as the central term for their biographical writings. For the ways in which they themselves conceptualised *sīra* we must turn to the works themselves. We can in any case be certain that they considered *sīra* to be a meaningful category, as the term reappears often in the titles of works, in internal references, in later mentions of the texts, and in poetry. Of the utmost importance is that for our authors *sīra* was not

[58] See below. Chase Robinson gives a primary meaning of "paradigmatic behaviour or conduct." *Islamic Historiography,* xiii.
[59] Perhaps because both are lexicographically based only on the very earliest Arabic sources — i.e. predominantly pre-Islamic poetry, the Qurʾān, and *ḥadīth* — when the derived meaning related to the *sīra* "genre" was not yet in use.
[60] W. Raven, "Biography of the Prophet", *EI3.*
[61] W. Raven, "Sīra", *EI2.*
[62] Robinson, *Islamic Historiography,* xxiv-xxv.
[63] D.F. Reynolds, *Interpreting the Self: Autobiography in the Arabic Literary Tradition* (Berkeley-Los Angeles-London: University of California Press, 2001), 39.
[64] On the latter, see amongst others various studies by Thomas Herzog, especially his monograph: *Geschichte und Imaginaire: Entstehung, Überlieferung und Bedeutung der Sirat Baibars in ihrem sozio-politischen Kontext* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2007).
[65] U. Rubin, *The Eye of the Beholder: The Life of Muhammad as Viewed by the Early Muslims (A Textual Analysis)* (Princeton: The Darwin Press, 1995).

interchangeable with *tārīkh,* the more general, but equally ill-defined term for "history" under which *sīra* is often subsumed or with which it is sometimes equated. This is evident from the fact that *sīra* is used in or to refer to all six texts written by Ibn ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir and Shāfiʿ b. ʿAlī. By contrast, ʿIzz al-Dīn b Shaddād's biography of Baybars, which is often seen as part of this corpus, is *not* called a *sīra* on the single extant manuscript's title page. Instead, here the text is denoted by the title *Tārīkh al-Malik al-Ẓāhir*, and in at least one internal reference the text is also referred to as a *tārīkh*.[66] Of course later authors often referred to the text by the same title as that ascribed to Ibn ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir's *sīra*, *al-Rawḍ al-zāhir fī sīrat al-Malik al-Ẓāhir,* but this is not supported by the manuscript itself. Interestingly, the last section of Ibn Shaddād's text is given a specific title: *Dhikr mā jazhū ʿalā zahr al-khamīla min jumal sīrati-hi l-jamīla* ("A mention of what blossoms into luxuriant flowers from the totality of his beautiful *sīra*"). Not only is this title much more closely related to those used by the Bānū ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir, its specific construction in fourteen chapters dealing with the sultan's virtues and deeds also relinquishes the strong focus on chronology. As will become clear below, it is this appendix to Ibn Shaddād's text which can most meaningfully be compared to the corpus of *sīra*'s written by Ibn ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir and Shāfiʿ b. ʿAlī, not only due to its name but also due to its specific evaluation of historical material.

Based on the ways in which ʿIzz al-Dīn b. Shaddād (at least in his annalistic section) on the one hand and Ibn ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir and Shāfiʿ b. ʿAlī on the other hand composed their works, the distinction between *sīra* and *tārīkh* may be said to have lain in the exact ways in which the works took the life or rule of a sultan as their subject. Ibn Shaddād seems to have used the "life" — or perhaps only the "rule", as the first part of the text is missing — of Baybars as the chronological ordering principle of his work, but did so relatively loosely. While the bulk of his subject matter is directly related to actions of the sultan or his agents, he also includes much material that seems more random. For example, he uses the format to end each year with lengthy obituaries of various personalities, many of whom did not have any link to the sultan, and he includes a number of anecdotes and longer stories that seem to arise more generally from his historical interests, such as a long account of the life and actions of the Ḥafṣid ruler of Tunis, Muḥammad b. Abī Zakariyā (d. 675 / 1277).[67] A similar format of historiography may be found in Ibn Aybak al-Dawādārī's (d. after 1335-36) ninth and last volume of his monumental world history *Kanz al-durar wa-jāmiʿ al-ghurar*, which is devoted entirely to the second and third reign of al-Nāṣir Muḥammad. This later work is entitled *Al-durar al-*

[66] MS Selimiye 2306, folio 1r. For the internal reference, see: *Tārīkh al-Malik al-Ẓāhir,* 88

[67] *Tārīkh al-Malik al-Ẓāhir*, 188-200. There may be an element of symmetry at play here, considering the placement of this short "life" of another sultan who died in the same year as the text's primary subject, Baybars.

fākhira fī ***sīrat*** *al-Malik al-Nāṣir* (like all the other volumes it also has a primary name related to the celestial spheres, *Al-jawhar al-anfas min qismat al-aṭlas*), which suggests that it is closer to the approach of our two main authors, but Ibn al-Dawādārī in fact also showcases an approach to regnal history as mostly a structural chronological phenomenon: most of the work is strictly divided into years and not all material included is directly related to the life and rule of the Sultan.[68] The much later author Ibn Taghrī-Birdī's (d. 874 / 1470) chronographic chronicle *al-Nujūm al-zāhira fī mulūk Miṣr wa-l-Qāhira* takes this idea of historical time structured in reigns even further by making it the primary principle of subdivision in a work that deals with history over several centuries and thus several reigns.

The approach to history taken by Ibn ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir and Shāfiʿ b. ʿAlī is of course not entirely dissimilar, considering their primary chronological focus on the reign of one person (though earlier reigns are included as part of the ruler's "life"), and there is a great deal of overlap and ambiguity — Ibn ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir's indirectly referring to his duty as that of a *muʾarrikh,* and Ibn al-Dawādārī's use of *sīra* in his title only complicates matters further[69] — but there are also differences which highlight a certain distinctive approach to writing a *sīra* instead of a *tārīkh*. For our two authors, the life and rule of the sultan are the main subject of their work, while the temporal nature of the accounts is sometimes only of secondary importance — in the second half of *al-Faḍl al-maʾthūr* it even becomes seemingly irrelevant — and almost every account is in one way or another included for the specific reason of highlighting one or more qualities of the ruler, or for painting an appropriate picture of his life or rule. Considering that the *dīwān al-inshāʾ* held a central position in the ruler's *dawla* due to its involvement in the linguistic articulation of the sultan's claim to authority, it is not surprising that events related to its activities are a major focus in these works. The years in which events took

[68] It is however significant that the sultan's first reign is not related in this part but in the eighth volume, together with (among others) the reigns of al-Nāṣir Muḥammad's brother al-Ashraf Khalīl, father Qalāwūn, and that of Baybars. In his introduction, Ibn al-Dawādārī claims that he devoted a single volume to this ruler mostly because there was not enough space to do so adequately in the preceding volume. However, the introduction does also include a panegyric to al-Nāṣir Muḥammad replete with celestial metaphors, linking it to the work's general historical-cosmological approach. *Kanz al-durar,* vol. 9:2-4 (the panegyric), 5-6 (the argument for a separate volume). Interestingly, the titles of the preceding volumes do not use the term *sīra,* but opt for *akhbār,* even in the volume devoted to the life of the Prophet and the Rāshidūn caliphs*: Al-durra l-zakiyya fī akhbār al-dawla l-Turkiyya* (vol. 8), *Al-durra al-maṭlūba fī akhbār mulūk Banī Ayyūb* (vol. 7), *Al-durra l-muḍiyya fī akhbār al-dawla l-Fāṭimiyya* (vol. 6), *Al-durra l-saniyya fī akhbār al-dawla l-ʿAbbāsiyya* (vol. 5), *Al-durra l-sāmiyya fī akhbār al-dawla l-Umawiyya* (vol. 4), *Al-durr al-thamīn fī akhbār sayyid al-mursalīn wa-l-khulafāʾ al-rāshidīn* (vol. 3), *Al-durra l-yatīma fī akhbār al-umam al-qadīma* (vol. 2), *Al-durr al-ʿulyā fī akhbār badʾ al-dunyā* (vol. 1).

[69] It should be noted that all further internal references to Ibn ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir's *sīra* of Baybars denote it as *sīra* and its author as *muʾallif* (author) or, at only one point, *kātib.* See for an overview of these instances: al-Nāṣir, "'Sīrat al-Malik al-Ẓāhir Baybars'", 90-92. The later author Ibrāhīm b. al-Qaysarānī also refers to his panegyric of al-Ṣāliḥ Ismāʿīl as *sīra* at one point, but the use is highly ambiguous, as the text does not contain much "biographical" information. Van Steenbergen, "Qalāwūnid Discourse", 21.

place and the changes of years are as such not always strictly noted and obituaries are only very rarely included.

The *sīra*'s thus partook of common characteristics of historiography in the period – a dominantly annalistic framework, a nearly exclusive focus on contemporary events, and of course, almost by default, a strong focus on the activities of the political elites -- but they also diverged in important domains, especially in their exclusive focus on events related to the life and reign of one person, which dictated the relatively tight textual structures. However, another important development in the period's historiography has been suggested, to which we must now turn our attention.

3.3.2 Literarisierung

In 1971, the German scholar and pioneer of Mamluk studies Ulrich Haarmann published a short but seminal article on the literary nature of the period's historiography, more or less as an addendum to his doctoral dissertation *Quellenstudien zur frühen Mamlukenzeit,* in which he gave an overview and analysis of intertextual relations between a number of important historiographical works of the period. The article further explored Haarmann's thesis that "Mamluk" historiography, when placed in a wider chronological context, seemed to showcase a number of new developments. According to him Mamluk authors made much use of narrative techniques in structuring their historical works, which they furthermore populated with miraculous stories, topoi and clichés. These features clearly distinguished Mamluk historical works from earlier historiography. While the historians did not innovate on a structural level where they mostly built on earlier traditions, the new developments amounted to a "literarisation of the inner form". The term "Literarisierung" which has been roaming through the field ever since, was born.[70] To overstate the distinction a little: for Haarmann, literature was to be equated with stories, with the anecdotal, the marvelous, the *unhistorical* so to speak, and though these elements were not without value – Haarmann would in fact devote quite a bit of attention to these "story" elements in later articles – they should be distinguished from actual *history*, which was about facts and data which could be mined from the sources. Or, as Bernd Radtke would evaluate his ideas, Haarmann proposed a strict

[70] U. Haarmann, "Auflösung und Bewahrung der klassischen Formen arabischer Geschichtsschreibung in der Zeit der Mamluken", *ZDMG*, 121/1 (1971), 46-60. It should be noted that a somewhat more vague idea of "Literarisierung" was already present in early twentieth-century German scholarship on the Islamic Middle Period, specifically in the work of Gustav Richter, Gustav von Grunebaum (who indeed at one point speaks of a "literarization of ideas and rhetoricization of style" as a dominant cultural phenomenon in *Medieval Islam: A Study in Cultural Orientation* (Chicago-London: The University of Chicago Press, 1953), 229), and Götz Schregle. Bernd Radtke sees Haarmann's article as building on that foundation, *Weltgeschichte und Weltbeschreibung im mittelalterlichen Islam* (Beirut-Stuttgart: Orient Institut-Franz Steiner, 1992), 186.

dichotomy of history which had been regarded as a science (*ʿilm*) versus history as *adab* as it emerges in the Mamluk period.[71] Like his contemporary Albrecht Noth, who wrote a dissertation on literary motifs in early Islamic texts, published as *Quellenkritische Studien zu Themen, Formen und Tendenzen frühislamischer Geschichts-überlieferung* and later translated and substantially revised as *The Early Arabic Historical Tradition: A Source-Critical Study* with Lawrence Conrad, Haarmann's comments were partly given in by the idea that an awareness of the "literary" nature of many accounts would help researchers to distinguish between the useful information on the one hand and the embellishment and formalities on the other hand.[72] Doing historiography amounted to filtering the facts from the narrative form of history.

Putting the studies of Noth and Haarmann next to each other already highlights the most important problem with Haarmann's thesis: literary elements had in fact been present in Islamic historiography from very early on, and the Mamluk period uses of such material did not amount to a really new development.[73] The most vocal critic of Haarmann's theory has been Bernd Radtke, and his most extensive treatment of the issue can be found in his diachronic study of universal histories *Weltgeschichte und Weltbeschreibung im mittelalterlichen Islam*. Here, he devoted much time to Ibn al-Dawādārī's nine-volume world history *Kanz al-durar wa-jāmiʿ al-ghurar* which has traditionally been seen as a prime example of "Literarisierung".[74] He also dealt with the topic in a number of articles, although he eventually changed his mind slightly in a short article from 2007.[75] Radtke's basic claim was that Haarmann's (and, following him, Barbara Langner's) evaluation of history as an objective *ʿilm* and literature as a subjective practice was a major anachronism and a division that never existed as such among contemporary authors. He furthermore highlighted the fact that even the appearance of more "entertaining" elements in historiography was hardly a new thing, as it had precedents at least as far back as al-Masʿūdī (d. 345 / 956). A much more

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[71] Radtke, "Einleitung" in *Kanz al-durar wa-jāmiʿ al-ghurar, Erster Teil: Kosmographie,* ed. B. Radtke (Cairo-Wiesbaden: Franz Steiner, 1982), 23-27; Radtke, *Weltgeschichte,* 186-187

[72] Noth, *Quellenkritische Studien zu Themen, Formen und Tendenzen frühislamischer Geschichtsüberlieferung* (Bonn: 1973); Noth & Conrad, *The Early Arabic Historical Tradition: A Source-Critical Study* (London: Darwin Press, 1994).

[73] For a more recent evaluation of the distinctive characteristics of Middle Period historiography compared to earlier periods, see Hirschler, "Islam: The Arabic and Persian Traditions", 267-286.

[74]Radtke, *Weltgeschichte,* 186-195. Here, Radtke in fact engages not only with Haarmann's first article and his reponse to Radtke's criticism formulated in the introduction to his edition of Ibn al-Dawādārī's first volume, but also with points raised by Barbara Langner in *Untersuchungen zur historischen Volkskunde Ägyptens nach mamlukischen Quellen* (Freiburg: Klaus Schwartz 1983).

[75] The most coherent example is Radtke, "Zur 'Literarisierten Volkschronik' Der Mamlukenzeit," *Saeculum* 41/1 (1990). The more recent change of attitude is found in Radtke, "Die Literarisierung der mamlukischen Historiografie: Versuch einer Selbstkritik", in *O ye Gentlemen: Arabic Studies on Science and Literary Culture. In Honour of Remke Kruk,* eds. A. Vrolijk & J. P. Hogendijk (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 263-274. The latter article still argues that historiographical "fictionality" was not a Mamluk innovation, but suggests that some changes in its uses may have taken place in the period.

thorough diachronic evaluation of the intersection of historiographical and literary practices would be necessary before any such claims about "literarisation" could be made.

While these debates took place in German academia, the biggest strides in narrative readings of historiography were taken in Anglophone studies of the historiography on the early Islamic period,[76] and on the later emergence of Persian historiography.[77] A number of studies have also applied a diachronic approach to reading historiographical sources up to the Middle Period. For example, Kurt Franz looked at how reports on the Zanj rebellion (869-883) were continuously recast in historiography from ʿAbbāsid to Mamluk times, and Heather M. Keaney did a similar study of the reports on the caliphate and murder of ʿUthmān (d. 656).[78] In different ways (Franz's approach is much more historical-critical than Keaney's) they both argue how historians framed these long past events in terms that bespoke larger debates about political authority and religious legitimacy felt throughout society in their own life and times. Compilation in

[76] Pioneering work was done by Albrecht Noth as noted above, and Lawrence I. Conrad in a number of articles: "Abraha and Muḥammad: Some Observations Apropos of Chronology and Literary 'topoi' in the Early Arabic Historical Tradition", *BSOAS,* 50/2 (1987), 225-240; Conrad, "Seven and the Tasbīʿ: On the Implications of Numerical Symbolism for the Study of Medieval Islamic History", *JESHO,* 31/1 (1988), 42-73. This type of research was taken to a larger scale by Tayeb El-Hibri who applied stimulating but theoretically largely unfounded symbolic readings of narrative, *Reinterpreting Islamic Historiography: Hārūn al-Rashīd and the Narrative of the ʿAbbāsid Caliphate* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999) and *Parable and Politics in Early Islamic History: The Rashidun Caliphs* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010). A similar approach has been followed by David S. Powers in *Zayd* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2014). However, Boaz Shoshan has criticized El-Hibri's approach even beyond the problematic lack of theoretisation, claiming that El-Hibri reduced early Arabic historiography too much to "commentary", "unjustifiably dismiss[ing] the claim to truth that is an intrinsic element in the rhetoric of historians", *The Poetics of Islamic Historiography: Deconstructing Ṭabarī's History* (Leiden: Brill, 2004), 6. Despite their differing approaches, both authors did convincingly show the strong narrative impulse involved in the writing of and construction of meaning in history. The work of Stefan Leder, despite its somewhat positivistic distinction between "fiction" and "fact", which in my eyes is analytically unproductive in the case of historiography, should also be noted. See especially: "The Literary Use of the Khabar: A Basic Form of Historical Writing," in *The Byzantine and Early Islamic Near East I: Problems in the Literary Source Material*, eds. A. Cameron & L. Conrad (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992), 277-315; Leder, "Conventions of Fictional Narration in Learned Literature," in *Story-Telling in the Framework of Non-Fictional Arabic Literature,* ed. Stefan Leder (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1998), 34-60; Leder, "The Use of Composite Form in the Making of the Islamic Historical Tradition," in *On Fiction and Adab in Medieval Arabic Literature*, ed. Philip F. Kennedy (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2005), 125-148.

[77] Marilyn Waldman offered an early theoretically mature evaluation of historiography in her *Toward a Theory of Historical Narrative: A Case Study in Perso-Islamicate Historiography* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1980). The work of Julie Scott Meisami has greatly developed these ideas in various articles and a monograph: "The Past in Service of the Present: Two Views of History in Medieval Persia," *Poetics Today* 14/2 (1993), 247-275; Meisami, *Persian Historiography to the End of the Twelfth Century* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1999); Meisami, "History as Literature", *Iranian Studies* 33, no. 1/2 (2000), 15-30; Meisami, "Masʿūdī and the Reign of Al-Amīn: Narrative and Meaning in Medieval Muslim Historiography," in *On Fiction and Adab*, 149-176.

[78] K. Franz, *Kompilation in arabischen Chroniken: Die Überlieferung vom Aufstand der Zanǧ zwischen Geschichtlichkeit und Intertextualität vom 9. bis ins 15. Jahrhundert* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2004); Heather M. Keaney, *Medieval Islamic Historiography: Remembering Rebellion*, (London-New York: Routledge, 2013). For an unpublished PhD dissertation with a similar approach, see A. Hagler, "The Echoes of Fitna: Developing Historiographical Interpretations of the Battle of Siffin" (Unpublished PhD thesis, University of Pennsylvania, 2011).

this context became an important ideological tool, as the choice of what to include and what to leave out reflects the author's own appraisal of history and, ultimately, the present.

Yet another approach, focused more on the formal structures of texts, was proposed by Ottfried Weintritt in re-evaluating the internal coherence of al-Nuwayrī l-Iskandarānī's (d. 773 / 1372) *Kitāb al-ilmām.* He argued that one should read this work not as a one-directional historiographical account, but as an *adab* work that made use of historiography as one of its many ordering principles. Its essential governing principle was *istiṭrād,* or "digression", which is central to *adab* compilations (*majmūʿa*, pl. *majāmīʿ*).[79] By arguing that al-Nuwayrī l-Iskandarānī's work should not be seen as a historical work exhibiting literary tendencies, but as a work that functioned fully within the logic of *adab*, he explicitly distinguished his approach from Haarmann's – which he did not challenge.[80]

Perhaps the biggest breakthrough in evaluations of the narrative nature of medieval Islamic historiography, especially for the Middle Period, has been Konrad Hirschler's *Authors as Actors,* an important inspiration for the present dissertation. In this close study of two authors who were active in seventh / thirteenth century Egypt and Syria, Ibn Wāṣil (d. 697 / 1298) and Abū Shāma (d. 665 / 1267), and of the ways in which they reframed events of the relatively recent past, he argued that their personal backgrounds were crucial for their evaluations of that history. Ibn Wāṣil was active in a number of courtly environments, including that of Baybars, while Abū Shāma deliberately eschewed such contexts and represented the ideal of an independent scholar devoted to knowledge without the possible limitations of patronage. As a result they came up with quite different views about the lives of the sultans Nūr al-Dīn and Ṣalāh al-Dīn, especially as it related to the times in which they themselves lived. Hirschler argued that historians were "active interpreters of their society [who] sought to make sense out of the past, which they presented in (relatively) coherent narratives by employing the right to speak".[81] Hirschler's focus lies most importantly on the construction of historical "meaning" by way of narrative techniques. Rather than focus on questions of historical truth and the intertextual genesis of certain accounts, this approach looks at what the significance was for an author to include or exclude a certain account or narrative in specific ways. Contextualisation is key in such an approach, as it allows us

[79] O. Weintritt, *Formen spätmittelalterlicher Islamischer Geschichtsdarstellung: Untersuchungen zu an-Nuwairī al-Iskandarānīs* Kitāb al-ilmām *und verwandten zeitgenössischen Texten* (Beirut-Stuttgart: Orient Institut-Franz Steiner, 1992).

[80] While presenting a very good analysis of the narrative and literary strategies in one particular biographical notice, Stephan Conermann also did not challenge Haarmann's thesis in "Tankiz ibn ʿAbd Allāh al-Ḥusāmī al-Nāṣirī (d. 740/1340) as Seen by His Contemporary al-Ṣafadī (d. 764/1363)", *MSR* 12/1 (2008), 1-24.

[81] Hirschler, *Medieval Arabic Historiography,* 3.

to interpret such authorial choices in the light of an author's social and intellectual background.[82]

Scholars who have worked on the corpus of *sīra*'s have implicitly taken a similar interpretative approach: they have argued that because of our authors' close links to court and their intellectual background as *kuttāb* their view of history was highly idealised and informed by panegyric perception. However, this basic evaluation and its implications of authorial agency in negotiating those specific contexts is then always subsumed under the earlier noted narrative of legitimisation instigated by a sultan. Interestingly, in his own evaluation of Mamluk sources Haarmann actually made an exception for the *sīra*'s written by Ibn ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir and Shāfiʿ b. ʿAlī: these were texts that followed in the footsteps of an older chancery tradition and thus fell outside of the influence of new historiographical tendencies.[83] While Haarmann thus claimed that these texts did not undergo the influence of this new "Literarisierung", the basic idea that a modern historian should read texts to distinguish between useful facts and rhetorical embellishment has been very much present in earlier studies of the corpus. More recent studies have actually taken the panegyric elements and their functions into account, but have done so almost entirely through the lens of legitimisation criticised above.

The approach of this dissertation concurs with the fact that the context in which our authors were active was defining for the specific narratives of rulership they constructed, but it aims to reconstruct more fully the multifocal nature of interactions within that context. "Literarisierung" in this approach, then, can be a useful focus if one identifies it as working within the matrix of "literary communication", a category of social interaction in which historiographical discourses interacted with discourses of (among others) poetry and correspondence writing in a way that is not dissimilar to the *istiṭrād* principle noted by Weintritt as bridging the perceived gap between historiography and *adab,* but more strictly contained to the immediate subject of the text, that is, less wide ranging. It will be argued below that adequately understanding the position of historiography at court is an important element of this.

[82] See also his articles "Studying Mamluk Historiography" for a general overview of tendencies in the study of historiography of the period; and "The Jerusalem Conquest of 492/1099 in the Medieval Arabic Historiography of the Crusades: From Regional Plurality to Islamic Narrative," *Crusades* 13 (2014), 37-76 for a case study of evolving historiographical accounts and meanings for one particular historical event.

[83] Haarmann, "Auflösung und Bewahrung", 54. Haarmann does not explicitate which chancery tradition our authors would be following then, but he likely referred to the Ayyubid works about Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn (see 3.3.3.1. and 4.3. below).

3.3.3 Court Historiography

The idea of legitimisation presupposes a close link between a historian and a courtly patron who commissioned or at least encouraged the writing of history as "a model for the present".[84] That such practices profoundly influenced the topics of historiography has been widely repeated, but the exact workings of patronage, and the position of historiography at court especially remain unclear. In what ways did thirteenth and fourteenth century rulers encourage the writing of historiography or to what extent did they read or make use of such works? Where did these works circulate? A number of valuable case studies have been undertaken which engage with these questions, but a more general evaluation is still very much wanting.[85] One study which has undertaken such an endeavour for a single text is Jo Van Steenbergen's *Caliphate and Kingship,* where a number of hypotheses were formulated about the various audiences engaging with al-Maqrīzī's *al-Dhahab al-masbūk fī dhikr man ḥajja min al-mulūk*, from its probably initial courtly intention to later audiences endowing it with new meanings.[86] A more extensive evaluation of courtly literature may be found in Konrad Hirschler's survey of the Damascene Ashrafīya library, much of which originated from al-Ashraf Mūsā's court library, from which it emerged that historiography was not an unimportant genre but neither did it come close to dominating the shelves.[87]

That literature in broad terms was much more widely consumed than historiography is also reflected by the relatively high number of specific historiographical works that probably circulated foremost as examples of "linguistic virtuosity". Chase Robinson has attributed al-ʿUtbī's early fifth / eleventh century *Kitāb al-yamīnī,* of which dozens, maybe even a hundred manuscripts survive, to its author's impressive stylistic command, rather than to its historical content.[88] A similar case may be made for ʿImād al-Dīn al-Kātib al-Iṣfahānī's late sixth / twelfth-century *al-Fatḥ al-Qussī fī l-fatḥ al-qudsī,* which survives in at least more than thirty manuscripts,[89] at least one of which was part of an Ayyubid courtly library, in Ḥamā.[90] That the latter's other great work on the life of

[84] Robinson, *Islamic Historiography,* 122.
[85] For one useful but necessarily limited survey on Islamic historiography's possible audiences, see C.F. Robinson, *Islamic Historiography*, 105-111. A dated overview and discussion of a number of "literary offerings" of the Mamluk period may be found in P.M. Holt, "Literary Offerings: A Genre of Courtly Literature", in *The Mamluks in Egyptian Politics and Society,* eds. T. Philipp & U. Haarmann (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 3-16.
[86] J. Van Steenbergen, *Caliphate and Kingship,* 130-133.
[87] Hirschler, *Plurality and Diversity*.
[88] Robinson, *Islamic Historiography*, 110. A very large number of (as yet unstudied) commentaries of this work are said to have survived from the Mamluk period. Personal communication by Matthew L. Keegan.
[89] C. Brockelmann, *Geschichte der Arabischen Literatur,* vol. 1, 315 & *Supplementband* 1, 548.
[90] The title page of Leiden Universiteitsbibliotheek, MS Or. 12b. notes:
عز الله بدوام العز والبقا الخزانه العالية المولوية السيدية الملكية المخدومية العمادية صاحب حماه المحروسة

Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn, the originally seven-volume *al-Barq al-Shāmī* survives only partially, may perhaps in part be attributed to its length: *al-Fatḥ al-Qussī* was the easier work to copy, as it consisted of only two volumes.[91]

However, the high attestation of al-ʿUtbī's and al-Iṣfahānī's works contrasts quite sharply with that of much historiography from our period, especially the *sīra*'s studied here, all but one of which survive only in single copies. Only Ibn ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir's *sīra* of Baybars has a slightly better attestation, with two known copies – both of which are however incomplete, and as seen above, their attribution is also problematic. Furthermore, as I will argue in Part Three, several of these manuscripts were likely holographs, donated by our authors themselves to the libraries of the sultan or to highly placed individuals as patronage gifts. That supposition of course brings this literature entirely into the courtly context, as that is where the manuscripts were intended to be consumed initially. Yet, the wide-ranging subject matter and large variety of textual genres suggests authors' participation in a field of wide literary signification.

Work by Konrad Hirschler on reading practices and Thomas Bauer on literary communication in the period has demonstrated that courts lost their dominance as major avenues of literary production and that texts spread widely throughout society. Whereas literature used to be consumed mostly in courtly environments, now it spread into much broader layers of society, and especially the urban elites of the *ʿulamāʾ* themselves created networks of such communication by extensively reading, commenting and reproducing each other's works.[92] Of course, urban literary salons (*mujālasa,* pl. *mujālasāt*) had existed before and had facilitated a sphere of literary contestation, communication and performance independent from the courtly environment,[93] but these dynamics seem to have greatly expanded in the period under study, also breaking loose from the framework of the salon. In fact, it is probably best to look at literature as a continuum rather than as our texts catering both to courtly and non-courtly readers, as genres and idioms evidently spread beyond the immediate environment of the sultan's court.

"May God strengthen with lasting force and permanence the reverent library of the lord the master the king the employer al-ʿImād the ruler of well-guarded Hama." This may refer to the famed historian-king al-Malik al-Muʾayyad ʿImād al-Dīn Abū l-Fidāʾ (d. 732 /1331), though the colophon is dated to well before his lifetime: 19 Ṣafar 601 (16 October 1204), so in that case the title page was added later to the manuscript. See also below 3.3.3.1. for another interesting copy of this text.

[91] L. Richter-Bernburg, "'Imād al-Dīn al-Iṣfahānī" in *Medieval Muslim Historians and the Franks in the Levant,* ed. A. Mallett (Leiden: Brill, 2014), 44.

[92] Bauer has called this the "adabization of the ʿulamāʾ and the ʿulamāʾization of the udabāʾ", "'Ayna hādha min al-Mutanabbī': Towards an Aesthetics of Mamluk Literature" *MSR* 17 (2013), 6. Hirschler, *The Written Word in the Medieval Arabic Lands: A Social and Cultural History of Reading Practices* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2012).

[93] Samer Ali, *Arabic Literary Salons in the Islamic Middle Ages: Poetry, Public Performance, and the Presentation of the Past* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2010)

3.3.3.1 A material approach to courtly literature

Pinning down the position of historiography within courtly literary settings thus remains somewhat difficult. If we really want to assess what was being read at court, we have to turn to a material approach, by mapping the extratextual and material aspects of those manuscripts of which we can surmise that they were intended for royal libraries because of their lavish execution. By charting consultation and ownership notes on manuscripts and trying to identify their writers, something can be said about which texts were read and why. I will try to formulate a number of insights on the manuscripts of the *sīra*'s in Part Three, but will now engage with two other examples that allow us to formulate some conclusions about contemporary courtly literary tastes. I will do so by looking at two texts that are traditionally linked to those of our authors, and the contents of which I will return to below in 4.3.

A first interesting example is taken from the Berlin manuscript of Bahāʾ al-Dīn b. Shaddād's (d. 632 / 1234) *sīra* of Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn (Saladin), *al-Nawādir al-sulṭāniyya wa-l-maḥāsin al-Yūsufiyya.* This manuscript's colophon is dated to 625 / 1228, well before the death of its author. Among the comparatively rich array of reading notes in the manuscript, we find the following note, written in a clear hand reminiscent of chancery edicts — though unfortunately on a page with a cut-off bottom-left corner:[94]

> اللهم أرحم ملوك الإسلام وأرحم مولانا السلطان الملك الظاهر الغازي المجاهد ركن الدنيا والدين بيبرس الصالحي قسيم أمير المؤمنين فاتح القلاع الكفار الحصينة مقاتل الفرسان الفرنجية ناصر دين الإسلامية مقصد ... التتار في بلدانهم مشتت سهامهم متص... بهادرتيهم مسبي حب...

> Oh God, have mercy on the kings of Islam, and have mercy on our lord the sultan al-Malik al-Ẓāhir the warrior (*ghāzī*), the wager of *jihād,* Rukn al-Dunyā wa-l-Dīn Baybars al-Ṣāliḥī, companion of the commander of the believers [the Caliph], conqueror of the strong castles of the unbelievers, fighter against the Frankish knights, helper of the Islamic religion, the striver for [...] the Tatars in their lands,[95] disperser of their arrows [?][96] [...] by their two verdurant earths [?], capturer of [...]

[94] A very short preliminary discussion of these results has been published in my article "Narrative Construction, Ideal Rule, and Emotional Discourse in the Biographies of Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn and Louis IX by Bahāʾ al-Dīn b. Shaddād and Jean Sire de Joinville", *al-Masaq* 30/2 (2018), 136-137.

[95] Reading *buldāni-him* instead of the manuscript's *b-l-dh-ʾ-n-hum* (بلذأنهم), assuming this is a misspelling.

[96] Reading *sihāmi-him* for the manuscript's سماهم or سهاهم, based on the fact that the dispersing of arrows is a common topos in this type of text.

The fact that somebody wrote a laudation of al-Ẓāhir Baybars on a manuscript of a *sīra* of his illustrious predecessor Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn, is already quite interesting. Ibn ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir repeatedly compares Baybars favourably to Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn in *al-Rawḍ al-zāhir*, and P.M. Holt has argued that the latter text's tripartite structure was also inspired by Ibn Shaddād's *sīra* — I will return to these aspects respectively in 5.3.2. and 4.3. What makes it even more interesting, however, is that next to this laudation, in a very similar though slightly freer hand we find an identification of its writer:

كتبه العبد الفقير بلبان الدوادار عفا الله عنه سادس عشر ربيع الاخر سنة تسع سبعين

> This was written by the humble servant Balabān, the *dawādār*, may God forgive him, on the 16th of Rabīʿ II, in the year [6]79 [June 12, 1280].[97]

This person can almost certainly be identified as Sayf al-Dīn Balābān al-Rūmī al-Ẓāhirī (d. 680 / 1281), whom we have met before (see especially 2.3.3.). One of the most important amirs during Baybars' reign, he oversaw the chancery and thus had very close relations to its officials. As noted above, Shāfiʿ names him as the one responsible for giving him his position in the *dīwān* of al-Saʿīd Bereke. A later page contains another reading note by someone who identifies himself as "Muḥammad b. Balabān al-dawādār", whom I have not been able to trace, but who must have been our Balabān's son.[98]

The dating of the reading note praising Baybars' deeds to a year after Qalāwūn's ascent of the throne, in a manuscript of a well-known *sīra* about a much-revered earlier sultan, raises quite a few questions concerning Balabān's attitude towards this regime change. His laudation of Baybars could be read as nostalgic or even subversive then, for Qalāwūn effectively wrested power from the hands of Baybars' sons. The fact that it was written in a text about the great deeds of an earlier sultan, which has been argued to have been implicitly critical for Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn's successors (who similarly wrested power from his sons' hands), even makes it into a highly symbolic action. However, for our purposes it is also strongly suggestive about what was being read in a courtly environment and more or less confirms the prevalent idea that historical works of a panegyric inclination circulated in that context.

[97] Berlin Wetzstein II 1893, folio 234 r. The year is written slightly unclear and may also be 709, but that would require another *dawādār* named Balabān who was alive in the early eighth / fourteenth century (I have not come across any such person), and who rather implausibly lauded Baybars more than thirty years after his death.
[98] Berlin Wetzstein II 1893, folio 235v.

This particular manuscript is in fact a small gold mine for a study of circulation: not only does it contain two names of Ayyubid princes,[99] on the pages following Balabān's statement, there is also a lengthy note detailing actions undertaken by Qalāwūn in Syria in 679 / 1280, which follows an annalistic format. While the specific function of the excerpt as a manuscript note itself is unclear, it is accompanied by the following note, in the same handwriting, dated to only about a month before Balabān's:

> انتقل الى ملك الفقير الى الله تعالى ابو الفضل ابي المجيد السنباطي وكتب في المحرم سنة تسع وسبعين وستمائة وهو في خدمة الأمير حسام الدين طرنطاي

> It [the book?] came into the possession of the humble God-fearing Abū l-Faḍl Abī l-Majīd al-Sunbāṭī (?), and [this] was written in Muḥarram of the year 679 [May 1280] while he was in the service of the amir Ḥusām al-Dīn Ṭurunṭāy.[100]

I have not been able to identify this Abū l-Faḍl Abī l-Majīd al-Sunbāṭī (the *nisba* is a tentative reading), but his master Ḥusām al-Dīn Ṭurunṭāy is very well known: he was the extremely powerful and influential viceroy (*nāʾib al-salṭana*) of Qalāwūn.[101] While the exact contents of this particular note need to be studied in more detail, the fact that it is related to Ṭurunṭāy is already a highly interesting find for our purposes, as he is also attested as one of the agents exchanging poetry with Fatḥ al-Dīn b. ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir (see 3.1. above). Of course, amirs writing poetry are not really exceptional and in later times sultans would even engage in wide-ranging literary performances and exchanges across West-Asia. What makes the case of Ṭurunṭāy so interesting is not only that he is otherwise not really portrayed as having had much of a literary inclination,[102] but his appearance in these two disparate contexts, as a participant in networks of literary communication and as a patron to an agent who engaged with a text that was apparently considered to be a classic of courtly literature at the time. Most importantly for our purposes, it brings the text into the direct social environment of our two authors.

[99] Muḥammad b. Muḥammad b. ʿUthmān b. Yūsuf b. Ayyūb and Tāj al-Mulūk b. al-Malik al-Manṣūr b. al-Malik al-ʿAzīz (note dated to 631 / 1233-34). Possibly also a certain al-Malik al-Amjad. Berlin Wetzstein II 1893: folio 233v and 234r. The Jerusalem manuscript of this text (which was also copied during the author's lifetime) also contains a note linking the text to the Ayyubid prince al-Amjad Ḥasan (d. 670/1271-72) and another note that also seems to refer to a certain Dāwūd Shāhanshāh, likely also an Ayyubid family member. Islamic Museum, al-Aqṣā Mosque / al-Ḥaram al-Sharīf, 203, folio 1r.
[100] Berlin Wetzstein II 1893, folio 235r.
[101] On him, see Northrup, *From Slave to Sultan,* 206-208.
[102] Northrup asserts that the historical sources tend to stress his military activities.

At least one manuscript of another text which I have referred to before also has some interesting evidence on circulation: ʿImād al-Dīn al-Iṣfahānī's *al-Fatḥ al-Qussī fī l-fatḥ al-Qudsī.* As noted above, this was a rather extensively copied text: at least thirty manuscript copies were extant when Brockelmann was compiling his *Geschichte der Arabischen Literatur*. This divergence surely points to more than mere lucky survival of manuscripts, but shows that this text had a continuous audience. One of the older extant manuscripts — the oldest of seven copies held in the Bibliothèque nationale de France in Paris (MS Arabe 1693) — furthermore contains two extremely interesting notes on its title page, which I have here simply reproduced from the manuscript scan.[103]

My reading of these two notes is: "*al-kitāb li-ʿAlāʾ*[104] *al-Dīn b. ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir*" ("This book is [owned by] ʿAlāʾ al-Dīn b. ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir") and "*li-ʿAlī b. ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir*" ("[Owned by] ʿAlī b. ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir").[105] It is clear that these two readers were members of the Bānū ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir. More specifically, the first person is very likely to be ʿAlāʾ al-Dīn, the grandson of our author Ibn ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir, himself a famous *kātib* and *adīb*. The latter's personal name was in fact also ʿAlī, so both notes could be referring to the same person, but they are most certainly written by two different hands.

P.M. Holt's suggestion that an indirect line of influence runs between the work of ʿImād al-Dīn al-Iṣfahānī and Ibn ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir suddenly becomes a lot more plausible, for at least one member of that family owned a copy of al-Iṣfahānī's most celebrated historical text.[106] It is however true that stylistically and content-wise al-Iṣfahānī's text does differ in many respects from those of our later authors. This has been maintained by Lutz Richter-Bernburg, who argued at length and by way of an impressive textual analysis of part of al-Iṣfahānī's longer work *al-Barq al-Shāmī,* that the self-proclaimed innovative way of writing history and idionsyncratic stylistic approach did not prove to be very popular among later historians, who indeed mostly abridged the historical information found in *al-Fatḥ* and *al-Barq* or copied only those parts that dealt in less

[103] BnF MS Arabe 1693, folio 2r. These seem to be two separate notes because of the two very different ways of writing the letter *hāʾ*.
[104] Reading علاى as a variant spelling of علاء.
[105] For the use of "li" in manuscript ownership statements, see: A. Gacek, *Arabic Manuscripts: A Vademecum for Readers* (Leiden-Boston: Brill, 2009), 176.
[106] Holt implicitly suggests a link by dealing with al-Iṣfahānī's and Ibn ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir's texts in the article "The Sultan as Ideal Ruler", although he mostly refers to the connection between al-Iṣfahānī and Bahāʾ al-Dīn b. Shaddād.

literarily elaborate fashion with historical events. What is more, some even explicitly complained about his somewhat idiosyncratic stylistic choices.[107] Yet, this does not mean that his texts were not read, and the cursory look at some of the manuscripts above does show its circulation among agents who were indirectly involved with the practice of writing *sīra*. As I shall discuss shortly, although ʿAlāʾ al-Dīn b. ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir did not write a *sīra,* he did compose at least one text that functioned within a similar idiom of interwoven praise and historical account.

3.3.3.2 Historiography in literary offerings

Another way of gauging courtly literature, is by looking at those texts that were certainly donated to the royal library or that of a highly placed individual, and to reconstruct courtly taste by way of what was deemed appropriate to offer to a ruler or courtly agent. A number of small-scale studies of this kind have been undertaken on manuscripts that were clearly part of a courtly library or that of an amir.[108] Studying this usually involves manuscript studies as well: frontispieces may contain references to a courtly patron for whom the book was intended (usually by using the formula *bi-rasmi*),[109] or they may be so lavishly decorated that a courtly dedicatee is likely. As we shall see in Part Three, most of the manuscripts of the corpus studied here can because of such reasons be situated in a courtly environment, though none of them can be directly related to the sultan. Explicit mentions of dedication may also be found in the texts themselves. That would usually be in the introductions, but interestingly, none of the surviving introductions of the corpus of *sīra*'s mention a patron or dedicatee. Ibn ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir does mention that he "served the prosperous library with the gathering of this sīra" (*khadamtu l-khizāna al-maʿmūra bi-jamʿi hādhihi al-sīra*) in his introduction to his *sīra* of Baybars, but the remainder of the rather enigmatic statement has unfortunately been cut off from the manuscript's page.[110]

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[107] Al-Ṣafadī criticised al-Iṣfahānī's use of *tajnīs* (paronomasia), arguing that al-Qāḍī l-Fāḍil's use of this stylistic was superior. Richter-Bernburg, *Der Syrische Blitz,* 204-5.

[108] P.M. Holt, "Literary Offerings" discusses the contents of seven such texts, one of which has been more extensively discussed by Jo Van Steenbergen in "Qalāwūnid Discourse". Barbara Fleming assessed literary production by *mamlūks* themselves in "Literary activities in Mamluk halls and barracks" in *Studies in Memory of Gaston Wiet,* ed. Myriam Rosen-Ayalon (Jerusalem 1977), 249-60, recently reprinted in *Essays on Turkish Literature and History* (Leiden-Boston: Brill, 2017), 105-116; Élise Franssen more recently studied one particular manuscript that was part of an amir's library in "What was there in a Mamluk Amīr's Library? Evidence from a Fifteenth-Century Manuscript" in *Developing Perspectives in Mamluk History. Essays in Honor of Amalia Levanoni,* ed. Y. Ben-Bassat (Leiden-Boston: Brill, 2017), 311-332.

[109] Gacek, *Arabic Manuscripts,* 197-198.

[110] *Rawḍ*, 46.

Shāfiʿ also mentions at one point that a part of what he included in his *sīra* of Qalāwūn had earlier been an independent work (*juzʾan mustaqillan*) which he had offered to the sultan's library (*bi-rasmi l-khizāna al-ʿāliyya l-mawlawiyya l-sulṭāniyya*).[111] This part may be called a "battle treatise", an historical text that described the events of a battle, often in laudatory fashion — Shāfiʿ's ends with two long praise poems on Qalāwūn's victory against the Mongols at Homs, one written by his cousin Fatḥ al-Dīn, another by himself[112] — a genre that was appreciated in courtly contexts. In the list of Shāfiʿ's works copied by al-Ṣafadī, there are two works that may be identified as such a text, the first of which is likely the original title of the *juzʾ* that was later embedded in *al-Faḍl al-maʾthūr*:

- *Al-masāʿī al-marḍiyya fī al-ghazwa l-Ḥimṣiyya* ("The satisfactory efforts in the Battle of Homs")
- *Mā yashraḥu al-ṣudūr min akhbār ʿAkkā wa-Ṣūr* ("Things that open the heart from the accounts about Acre and Tyre"), which I am assuming would likely be accounts about the conquests of these cities by al-Ashraf Khalīl and Qalāwūn, respectively. It may be related to the closing section of *al-Faḍl al-maʾthūr*.[113]

Another battle treatise written by the youngest member of the Bānū ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir, ʿAlāʾ al-Dīn is known. Giving his uncle a run for his money, it details in sustained and verbose *inshāʾ* the battle at Marj al-Ṣufr / Shaqḥab in 702 / 1303. This work, which according to al-Nuwayrī was entitled *Al-Rawḍ al-zāhir fī ghazwat al-Malik al-Nāṣir* (i.e. a variation on the presumed title of his grandfather's *sīra* of Baybars) has survived in a single manuscript and has been edited by Tadmurī, but I have not been able to consult this version as I was only notified of its existence very late in the process of writing this dissertation.[114] The text is however also rendered by al-Nuwayrī and al-Maqrīzī. We have already come across this author as having had a close relation to ʿAlāʾ al-Dīn. Interestingly, al-Nuwayrī provides some context:

> وقد ذكر الناس هذه الغزوة نظمًا ونثرًا ووقفتُ مما عُمِل فيها على أشياء كثيرة وقد رأيتُ أن أورِد من ذلك ما نقف عليه من النظم والنثر. فكان ممن عمل في ذلك القاضي الرئيس الفاضل علاء الدين علي بن عبد الظاهر صنّف في خبر هذه الوقعة جزءًا سماه الورض الزاهر في غزوة الملك الناصر.

[111] *Faḍl*, 85.
[112] *Faḍl*, 82-85.
[113] al-Ṣafadī, *Aʿyān al-aṣr*, 2:507.
[114] I have since been told that the manuscript is in fact held in St. Petersburgh and not in Berlin, and that it is dedicated to al-Nāṣir Muḥammad's cousin al-Muẓaffar Mūsā b. al-Ṣāliḥ ʿAlī. I am grateful to Frédéric Bauden for providing me with this information.

> People reported this battle in verse and in prose, and I have seen many things that have been made about it, and I thought that we may ponder what was produced about [this battle] in verse and prose. One of those who wrote on this was the *qāḍī,* the *raʾīs,* the outstanding (*al-fāḍil*) ʿAlāʾ al-Dīn b. ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir who composed a work (*juzʾan*) about this battle which he entitled "The resplendent garden, that is, the battle of al-Malik al-Nāṣir".[115]

He furthermore provides us with some extremely interesting information about its performance and reception after he has given the full text:

> ولما صنّف المولى علاء الدين هذه الغزوة وعُرضت على المسامع الشريفة السلطانية شمله الأنعام والتشريف السلطاني ووفّر حظَّه من ذلك. وقد سمعتُ هذه الغزوة من لفظه ونقلتها من خطه وقد أتى فيما أورده بالواقعة المشاهدة ووفّى بقوله: إن الغائب إذا وقف على خبره يكون كمن شاهده.

> When the master ʿAlāʾ al-Dīn[116] had composed this battle [treatise], he presented (*ʿuriḍat*) it to the noble ears of the sultan who bestowed favour and a sultanic robe of honour on him, and his fortune (*ḥaẓẓ*) increased because of this. I heard this battle [treatise] personally from him, copied it from his handwriting, and I mentioned it amongst those things produced about the facts that have been witnessed [by an eyewitness] (*al-wāqiʿa al-mushāhada*). It is presented [here] according to the saying: "if the absent is informed about its account he is as one who saw it with his own eyes".[117]

Al-Nuwayrī's remarks on the text and Shāfiʿ's own claim to have donated a similar text to the sultan's library throws some light on the particularities of this "genre" and its courtly nature. Poems and prose texts congratulating the sultan on a victory were of course already for centuries a mainstay of the Arabic literary tradition, and we find many such poems throughout the historiographical literature of late medieval Egypt and Syria as well. As such, these battle treatises may be read as similar works to the established tradition of congratulatory poems, but reflected through the lens of *inshāʾ*. It will be my contention in the following parts that the *sīra*'s must have grown out of similar courtly literary traditions.

This seems to be the way in which historiography worked in courtly settings then: as discourses about the past that were performed in a continuum with practices of

[115] *Nihāyat al-arab*, 32:20.
[116] He describes ʿAlāʾ al-Dīn as "*mawlā*" in the other instance noted above as well. *Nihāyat al-arab,* vol. 8:96
[117] *Nihāyat al-arab*, 32:32.

panegyric poetry and *inshāʾ* writing, both of which had a firm position within the courtly literary habitus. Perhaps it is more fruitful to see "literarisation" in this period as a transformation of that habitus then: a blurring of genre boundaries and a blending of discourses typical to one setting or another, which did not so much result in entirely new genres, but in hybrid texts that showcase significant degrees of both compilation and cohesion (a seeming paradox to which I will return in 5.1.). The complexity and multi-focality of such texts should not be seen as chaotic, or "inartistic" as P.M. Holt does in some cases, but as authors engaging in various ways with discourses prevalent within the courtly context and crafting texts that harmonised or at least brought together several such discourses as a way to showcase their masterful command of language and form.

Conclusion

Obviously, the literary forms of expression employed by our authors and other agents in the literary field were not restricted to the practices of poetry, *inshāʾ*, and historiography as evaluated, but these are the most relevant for a broad evaluation of the context within which our authors wrote *sīra*'s. Other relevant textual practices will be discussed when they appear below. *Sīra* clearly denoted a complex set of meanings that may be said to have been taken even further by our authors in their works: for them it came to denote one of the most important performative avenues for their writing, a type of text that could accommodate the various types of literary expression and communication they engaged in. And indeed, as we shall see, poetry, *inshāʾ* in the form of both official documents and artful prose renderings of particular events or things, and annalistic historiography all converged in these texts, instrumentalised for the greater goal of glorifying the *dawla* of the sultan, and, as we shall see, the scribe's central position within that *dawla*. The literary field as we have sketched it is of course only a small part of the larger literary field in Cairo and the Mamluk sultanate at large, but these examples do already clearly show a glimpse of the wide-ranging stakes of the field within which our authors operated and performed their mastery of literary paradigms. It is now time to turn to how exactly we should link the six *sīra*'s written by our authors to this literary field and to the social practices within which it operated.

Part Two: Texts

Having acquainted ourselves with the relevant contexts in which the texts of our corpus should be understood, we can now turn to analysis of the texts themselves. This will be done in three chapters. Chapter Four will be focused on the larger frameworks of what our authors understood their *sīra*'s to be, building on insights formulated above in 3.3.1. The analysis will here be situated first on the level of their titles and then on that of their preserved introductions. The insights from these introductions (and to a lesser degree of the titles) will prove crucial for the remainder of this dissertation and I will as such already summarise its major insights in the following paragraph to clearly signpost this argumentative framework. Chapter Five will focus on the interactions between historiographical claims and narrative constructions, and aims to better understand the interweaving of literary and historical aims by our authors in their body texts. This will be done on two levels again: first on that of large scale constructions in the works (5.2.), from which it will become clear that our authors did not merely write annalistic compilations but cohesive works that aligned information for specific narrative purposes. On a second level I will re-evaluate the common interpretation of these texts as showcasing ideal rule (5.3.), especially through re-enactment, which I will interpret as forms of historicisation, to deepen the historical web of the texts. Lastly, in Chapter Six, I turn to what I call the composition of *sīra* and look at two essential formal features of the texts: their uses of language registers and discourses *about* language (6.1.), and the practice of compilation (6.2.). I will argue that both these types of discourses were important performative practices.

The general argumentative thread that will run throughout this part and indeed this dissertation in general will be more fully discussed in the subchapters of 4.3., but may already be announced here for the sake of clarity. It will be shown that in all three preserved introductions of the *sīra*'s, crucial arguments were made about the importance of writing *sīra*. In these prolegomena, the authors brought together three main elements to posit their undertaking, two of which are common to all three texts — the remaining third element is specific to Shāfi''s aim to abridge his uncle's *sīra* of Baybars and is thus understandably absent from the other texts, but may in fact be understood in conjunction with one of the other categories. These are the three main

elements, which will be taken as important reference points for my textual analysis in the following two chapters:

- The importance of history writing, specifically in the form of *sīra,* as a medium to edify later generations (of rulers); that is, the oft-repeated idea of history as *exemplum.*
- The exemplarity of this specific sultan's life and reign, which amounts more or less to a praise section framed in the context of historical writing.
- The cruciality of the author's own presence as an eyewitness and participant in the events to be discussed as a claim for the superiority of the accounts to follow – in Shāfiʿ's case of abridging, it is the personal relationship between the author and his uncle which is stressed.[1]

This three-pronged and fundamentally interwoven argument will prove essential, as it clearly equates the importance of the subject of the *sīra* to its author. That is, it is argued that the texts gain their relevance as historical exemplum – essential to the concept of history and *sīra* especially – not only through the exemplarity of a specific sultan's deeds, but also through the exemplarity of the author who recorded these deeds. Historiography becomes the arena where these two elements meet, in which presentation and mediation become fundamentally intertwined. This insight is crucial for the remainder of my discussion, as much of it will show how our authors actively participated in their texts and used their writings to perform claims to social status or to negotiate it. These three interrelated arguments may furthermore be understood as the basis for the subdivision of this part in three chapters: the first deals with the historical arguments and conceptualisations for *sīra,* the second with the specific application of these ideas to the life and deeds of the sultan, while the third looks at the writerly practices used to compose such a work. However, I will not develop this division rigidly and refer back to all three parts of the argument at regular points.

[1] Note that these differ from the three main aspects distinguished by Anne Troadec ("Les Mamelouks dans l'espace syrien", 226-227) for the corpus: 1. "datation", that is "un travail de datation et de mise en ordre chronologique d'une série d'événements", 2. "référence au passé" or "la recherche de validation des figures de leur temps par la référence à des modèles éprouvés du passé" (which I will show to be only really relevant for one of these texts and much less so for the others), and 3. "souci d'édification morale", i.e. as an advice text. She notes the fact that the *sīra*'s often contain a very *personal* vision of history, but does not evaluate it as a crucial building block of their general writerly project.

Chapter 4
The meanings of *sīra*: Genres, titles, introductions

قالت لك القلم الذي كم طرّزت سِيَرٌ به وقصائد وترسلُ
ناديتُها لا شيء من ذا نافع قلم البليغِ بغير حظٍّ مُغزَل

[My conditions] said: 'Yours is the pen by which so many *sīra*'s, odes, and letters have been embroidered'
I cried out to them: 'None of that is useful!
Without [the help of] fate the pen of the eloquent is [but] a spindle!'[1]

These lines are part of a lengthy elegy in which Ibn ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir expressed his grief for the death of al-Ẓāhir Baybars. In a typical stage-sharing between dedicatee (most likely Baybars' son al-Saʿīd Bereke) and poet found in much panegyric poetry, Ibn ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir associates the death of his patron with the ways in which he has put his pen to use: for writing *sīra*'s, odes (*qaṣāʾid*), and letters (*tarassul*). What is interesting for our

[1] The 77-line poem in which this line appears is not recorded by Ibn ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir himself, although it was likely part of *al-Rawḍ al-zāhir*'s lost closing pages. This long version is quoted by ʿIzz al-Dīn b. Shaddād as the first poem in a section on "Choice pieces from the elegies written for [the sultan]", *Tārīkh al-Malik al-Ẓāhir,* 243-248. The quoted lines are situated near the end of the poem on p. 248. The poem is widely attested, but only one other version includes these lines: a 39-line abridgement given by Ibn al-Furāt, *Tārīkh duwal al-mulūk, volume 7,* 90-92, in which *kam* ("how") is substituted for *qad,* and the verb *nādaytu-hū* ("I cried out to her") for *fa-ajabtu-hā* (the somewhat tamer "so I answered her"). An abridged 54-line version without these lines is quoted by Ibn al-Dawādārī (*Kanz al-durar,* vol. 8:214-217). The lines are also not included in a 22-line abridgement by Shāfiʿ in *Ḥusn al-manāqib,* 336-338, nor in a rather truncated ten-line version quoted by Baybars al-Manṣūrī in *Zubdat al-fikra,* 161-162; al-ʿAynī in *ʿIqd al-jumān*, 2:183-184; and Ibn Iyās in *Badāʾiʿ al-zuhūr fī waqāʾiʿ al-duhūr,* ed. M. Mustafa (Wiesbaden: Franz Steiner, 1975), vol. 1:339. Note that the last word, *mughzal,* which I have translated as "spindle", is derived from the root letters *gh-z-l,* as is *ghazal,* a type of love poetry highly popular in the period. Ibn ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir wrote several *ghazal*'s which may be found in his *dīwān* (ed. Gharīb Muḥammad ʿAlī Aḥmad (Cairo: Maṭbaʿat Dār al-Bayān, 1990), 2-15). As such, the last line may also imply that the author considered his *sīra*'s, *qaṣīda*'s and letters to be of greater importance than his popular *ghazal* poetry, as the former types of literature gained their status by the assistance of fate, that is, the association with a sultan, whereas *ghazal* poetry is merely a natural result of having an eloquent pen.

purposes, is that in the logic of this poem a third major field of literary performance must be added to the two standard occupations of a *kātib-adīb*: not only does he write excellent poetry and is he a true "epistophile",[2] he also writes *sīra*'s. In fact, the grammatical structure of the second hemistich suggests that *sīra* was the *primary* occupation, followed by odes and letters – of course this particular phrase is also ruled by metrical considerations, which may have obliged the author to put *siyar* up front.

But what exactly were these *sīra's* "embroidered" by our author? And why is it of such importance in his self-presentation? This first chapter devoted to textual analysis will deal with these questions for both our authors and a number of related authors by looking at the uses and meanings of the term *sīra,* as these are reflected in the texts' initial presentations, that is, in their titles and introductions. The title interpretations with which I will start may come across as rather radical without any further context, but as we shall see in the following section in which I analyse the text's introductions in detail (4.2.) and in the next chapter where I look at specific narrative constructions found in the texts (5.2.), I hope the sense of my interpretation will become clear.

4.1 Entitling a *sīra*

Titles of Islamic texts were from the fourth / tenth century onwards very often made up of two rhyming parts, which A. Ambros has called a literary "guiding phrase" ("Leitphrase") and a more to the point "thematic phrase" ("Themaphrase") in his metastudy of these titles, which will be an important reference in the following section.[3] Due to the "literary" nature of these titles, many modern researchers considered these constructions to have been merely rhetorical and not highly significant for the contents they signposted, and as such they have received little attention. More recently, however, a number of scholars have highlighted how these seemingly fanciful titles could actually be very valuable in signposting readers to the contents and goals of specific works. Konrad Hirschler has for example argued for two prominent thirteenth century historical works that their titles were one of several domains in which one may see authorial agency at work. In his view these titles were "markers for modes of emplotment and were intended to prepare the reader for the following narrative

[2] I borrow this apposite neologism from Zadie Smith's novel *White Teeth* (London: Penguin Books, 2000), 314.
[3] A. Ambros, "Beobachtungen zu Aufbau und Funktion des gereimten klassisch-arabischen Buchtitels", *Wiener Zeitschrift für die Kunde des Morgenlandes* 80 (1990), 13–57. I borrow the translations of these terms from Hirschler, *Medieval Arabic Historiography,* 66.

structure".[4] Indeed, considering the great value attached to rhetorics and literary competence for authors of the period, it is only natural that titles too functioned within frameworks of literary communication, and we should not disregard them as irrelevant. These titles communicated common textual associations that must have been intended to influence to some degree the ways in which readers approached the books.[5]

However, while it is interesting to study the titles of these works in more detail and relate them to the textual contents or the narrative structures to follow, there is an important caveat here: none of our authors made internal references to their texts by using these titles. When they do refer to their texts, this is done in very short fashion by simply referring to "the/this *sīra".* Neither do our authors refer to their titles in the preserved introductions, even though it seems to have been relatively common practice to do so among some earlier and later authors.[6] As such, we have to make do with the titles as rendered on the manuscript's title pages and establish a hypothetical direct relation with the contents of the works. Furthermore, these title pages have only survived for four of the six texts written by Ibn ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir and Shāfiʿ b. ʿAlī. For the two other texts we may also deduce their titles by way of mentions in other works, but here too, many authors do not bother actually naming the full titles of the works from which they copied information. Indeed, Dwight F. Reynolds has argued that shortened versions of titles, such as "the *Sīra* of so-and-so", very commonly became the main reference titles "in medieval bibliographies, indexes, and cross-references in other works".[7] As I have discussed above in my introductory discussion of texts and authors, this has led to some disagreement concerning the actual title of Ibn ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir's *sīra* of Baybars. I will deal with the texts in a hypothetical chronological order.

[4] Hirschler, *Medieval Arabic Historiography,* 67.
[5] Ambros explicitly sees them as a "phenomenon of literary communication", "Beobachtungen", 19.
[6] A selection of earlier and later works that do explain or at least mention their title in their introductions: Bahāʾ al-Dīn b. Shaddād, *al-Nawādir al-sulṭāniyya*, 26; ʿImād al-Dīn al-Iṣfahānī, *al-Fatḥ al-Qussī,* 11-12; Ibn al-Dawādāri, *Kanz al-durar wa-jāmiʿ al-ghurar,* vol. 9:5; al-Maqrīzī, "al-Dhahab al-masbūk fī dhikr man ḥajja min al-khulafāʾ wa-l-mulūk", in *Caliphate and Kingship in a Fifteenth-Century Literary History of Muslim Leadership and Pilgrimage,* ed. & transl. Jo Van Steenbergen (Leiden: Brill, 2016), 182-183 (only part of the title, see footnote 13 on page 63); Ibn al-Shiḥna, *al-Badr al-zāhir fī nuṣrat al-Malik al-Nāṣir Qāyitbāy* (Beirut: Dār al-kitāb al-ʿarabī, 1983), 31. However, Ambros claims that "die Inkorporierung des Titels in ein Vorwort ist nicht der Regelfall." "Beobachtungen", 15.
[7] Reynolds, *Interpreting the Self,* 39.

4.1.1 al-Rawḍ al-zāhir fī sīrat al-Malik al-Ẓāhir / al-Faḍl al-bāhir fī sīrat al-Malik al-Ẓāhir

As we have seen, two titles have been suggested as plausible for Ibn ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir's *sīra* of Baybars, both of which agree on the second part: *sīrat al-Malik al-Ẓāhir,* although al-Nāṣir also notes a variant of the second title in which *sīra* is replaced by the more general term *akhbār* ("reports"). The two possible variations of the remaining first part are both iterations of common phrases. The use of *rawḍ* or *rawḍa* ("garden") in titles was extremely popular among pre-modern Arabic authors.[8] In his study of Abū Shāma's *Kitāb al-rawḍatayn,* which uses the image of two gardens to denote the exemplary reigns of Nūr al-Dīn and Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn, Konrad Hirschler already gave a lot of insightful semantic data about the term *rawḍ* and claimed that Abū Shāma used it as a distinctive metaphor for the information contained within his work: as two exemplary, chronologically closed off narrative constructions.[9] Ambros associated it with "enjoyment" and noted its frequent pairing with words related to "water, refreshment, vegetation, blossoming, breeze, good smell, [and] edible [things]".[10] It is thus not surprising that Ibn ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir's title adds the adjective *zāhir* ("radiant, resplendent", derived from the substantive *zahra*, "flower") to it, which emphasises the natural brilliance of this garden with which the *sīra* of al-Ẓāhir Baybars is equated.[11] For although the ruler's name draws attention to itself, in fact the word *sīra* is the main substantive here, the first part of the *iḍāfa*-construction making up the second part of the title. One may interpret this as being a panegyric statement about the excellence, or more literally radiance evident from the reign and events contained within this *sīra,* but we can also read it slightly differently and interpret *sīra* as the central notion here: it is the *writing* of this work that creates this resplendent garden, the act of *historicising* the sultan's life and actions generates its existence as *sīra*. I choose to follow this line of interpretation here, and will develop the argument that this is true for all six texts studied when discussing the following titles and the three extant introductions.

The alternative title leaves out the garden metaphor, but communicates a similar idea. *Al-faḍl al-bāhir* may be translated as "the brilliant merit", with *faḍl* especially covering rich semantic field that can not easily be rendered into English. The broad

[8] Ḥajjī Khalīfa (Kātip Çelebi, d. 1068/1657) listed more than 150 works that had a title starting with *rawḍ, rawḍa* and *rawḍāt.* Of these, three start with *Rawḍ al-azhār* and two with *al-Rawḍ al-zāhir* (one of them being our author's). *Kashf al-ẓunūn ʿan asāmī l-kutub wa-l-funūn* (Beirut: Dār iḥyāʾ al-turāth al-ʿarabī, n.d.), vol. 1:916-933. Ambros lists "*rawḍ*" together with two other "Leitwörter" (*fatḥ* and *kashf*) as the fourth most common word in Mamluk era guiding phrases, preceded only by *tuḥfa, durr*, and *qawl*.
[9] Hirschler, *Medieval Arabic Historiography*, 67-69.
[10] Ambros, "Beobachtungen", 22.
[11] It is also in general one of the most commonly used adjectives in titles. Ambros, "Beobachtungen", 36.

meaning is evident from the extensive use of the related plural form *faḍāʾil* (singular, *faḍīla*) to denote a genre of texts (or perhaps again more accurately a discursive tradition) which "exposes the excellences of things, individuals, groups, places, regions and such for the purpose of a *laudatio*".[12] The form *faḍl* itself was also not unfrequently used by Arabic scholars for book titles, but is notably less popular than the much more figurative *rawḍ*.[13] Here too, the grammatical construction suggests a linking of "the brilliant merit" in the first place to *sīra,* emphasising how this *faḍl* is a result of the author's undertaking.

4.1.2 Tashrīf al-ayyām wa-l-ʿuṣūr bi-sīrat al-sulṭān al-Malik al-Manṣūr

The title of Ibn ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir's second text, which may be rendered as "The exaltation of days and epochs by way of the *sīra* of the sultan al-Malik al-Manṣūr" is relatively peculiar, although our author also refers to the text at the end of its second volume more generically as "al-sīra l-sulṭāniyya l-Malakiyya l-Manṣūriyya".[14] Ḥajjī Khalīfa lists no other works of which the titles start with *tashrīf*. Nor do Ambros and Aḥmad b. Muṣṭafā Ṭāshköprüzade (d. 968 / 1561) in his *Miftāḥ al-suʿāda wa-miṣbāʿ al-siyāda fī mawḍūʿāt al-ʿulūm* — an admittedly much less comprehensive work. On the other hand, variations of the phrase *tashrīf al-ayyām* are attested. One of its most interesting occurrences is in the lyrical, panegyric introduction written by Ibn al-Dawādārī in the introduction to the earlier mentioned ninth volume of his universal chronicle, which is specifically devoted to the reign of al-Nāṣir Muḥammad, where he writes in *sajʿ* (and not in poetry, as the layout may suggest):

ولا مدرك ولا حاصر* لمولانا السلطان الملك الناصر*
الذي ملأت هيبته الأوهام * وحيرت صفاته الأفهام *
وتشرفّت بأيامه الأيام * والجمع والشهور والأعلام *
وعلت همّته على الأفلاك * وخضعت له ملوك الأملاك *

> And there is noone who reaches [the height of] and noone who besieges our lord the sultan al-Malik al-Nāṣir [Muḥammad], whose esteem populates conceptions, whose qualities bewilder thoughts. *And the days are exalted by the*

[12] R. Sellheim, "Faḍīla", *EI2.*
[13] Nineteen works are listed by Ḥajjī Khalīfa, *Kashf al-ẓunūn*, 2:1278-1280. We may add Shāfiʿ's *al-Faḍl al-maʾthūr* to this list, as like all other works by Shāfiʿ, it is not mentioned by Ḥajjī Khalīfa.
[14] *Tashrīf,* 75.

> *days [of his reign]*, as are the weeks, months, and banners. His importance continuously provides for the stars, and the kings of the lands submit to him.[15]

Ibn al-Dawādārī himself acknowledges to have used *al-Rawḍ al-zāhir* as a source – though with the alternate title *al-Faḍl al-bāhir* -- but not *Tashrīf al-ayyām*. Although Ibn al-Dawādārī may have been aware of Ibn ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir's work, his use of this particular phrase in the panegyric more likely arises from common literary usage, that is, as a metonymical association that circulated in poetical discourse.

Despite not appearing elsewhere as primary word in titles, *tashrīf* is a significant word choice in itself. Among Arabic terms this is in fact one of the better studied for our period because of the thorough work of Werner Diem, who not only extensively discussed the practice of the gifting of robes of honour ("ehrendes Kleid") denoted by this term, but also the various semantic uses of the term ("ehrendes Wort"), which underwent significant changes of meanings in the Mamluk period.[16] As I have mentioned above in 1.2.1., *ayyām* was often used as a denominator for the temporal aspect of a period of rule, similar but with a less wide ranging signification as *dawla*. *Tashrīf al-ayyām* was thus a powerful construction, with very strong significations of the rituals of power and ideal sultanic rule: *tashrīf* as the gifting of robes of honour which was a sultanic prerogative and an integral part of power's ritual performance, as well as the more abstract meaning of the conveying of honour on a beneficiary and of integrating that beneficiary in the benefactor's intimacy, while *ayyām* denotes the temporal aspect of power itself as well as the beneficiary of that honour. As both Ibn ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir and Shāfiʿ b. ʿAlī presented their historiographical undertaking by way of a three-pronged argument that mixed historical time, sultanic exaltedness, and the personal literary project of the author, this title may be said to convey a similar idea: *tashrīf* denotes the sultan's power, *ayyām* and *ʿuṣūr* connect it to time as historiography's major concern, and the following connecting word to *sīra* stresses the authorial agency of Ibn ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir.

This connection is actually a lot more pronounced in this title than in *al-Rawḍ al-zāhir* because Ibn ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir uses a much less commonly occuring prefix (at least in titles) to link the guiding and thematic phrases here: the prefix *bi-* ("with") instead of the stand-alone word *fī* ("in") — as we shall see shortly, three of the other known titles from the corpus do not use *fī* either and resort to the stand-alone word *min*. The difference

[15] *Kanz al-durar,* 9:2. I have taken over the layout from the edition (although there the first line is in larger script), assuming that it is based on the manuscript's layout. Italics mine.
[16] Werner Diem, *Ehrendes Kleid und ehrendes Wort: Studien zu Tašrīf in mamlūkischer und vormamlūkischer Zeit*, (Würzburg, 2002), esp. 135-170 on various stylistic examples (*tajnīs,* metaphor, metonymy, paradoxon) of the use of this term.

may seem subtle, but the shift in meaning is quite significant: the *bi-* establishes an instrumental relation between the guiding and thematic phrases which *fī* merely suggests. Common translations for this prefix are "with" and "by", but there is also a strong connotation of "by means of", which Hans Wehr even specifies as "designating instrumentality or agency".[17] One may see this at work in one of the most widely used Arabic-Islamic phrases present in nigh on every (pre-modern) work: *bi-smi l-lāhi,* "in the name of God," the invocation of God's supremacy and the name of God as primary discursive legitimation. The use of the word in this title is of course less reverent, but the connotation of instrumentality suggested by the *fī* in the previously discussed title is definitely more pronounced here. The days and eras/epochs are exalted exactly because of — indeed, "by way of" — the *sīra.* Whether the focus should be on *sīra* or the sultan here is as debatable as it was in the title of *al-Rawḍ al-zāhir,* but considering that *tashrīf* already alludes to the sultan's powerful position, one may perhaps see *sīra* as powerful in its own right, while "al-sulṭān al-Malik al-Manṣūr" adds the specification of this *sīra*'s subject matter.

4.1.3 al-Alṭāf al-khafiyya min al-sīra l-sharīfa l-sulṭāniyya l-malakiyya l-Ashrafiyya

The title of Ibn ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir's last *sīra* has been rendered traditionally with an equivalent of "hidden" or "concealed" for the adjective *khafiyya*.[18] While this is indeed the modern meaning, in earlier times the term had significations both of being hidden and of its opposite, i.e. as something that appears, or which becomes perceptible or manifest.[19] Furthermore, there is a related phrase *khafī l-luṭf* which is still widely used as a designation for God in supplication prayers (*duʿāʾ*) and poetry. The connotation seems to be that God is not so much the concealer of grace (*luṭf*), but the keeper of it, the one who may dispense it to who addresses him in supplication. These kinds of ambiguous

[17] Wehr, *Arabic-English Dictionary,* 48.
[18] See among others: Flinterman, "The Cult of Qalāwūn", 26; F. Bauden, "Ibn ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir", *EI3;* D.P. Little, "Historiography of the Ayyubid and Mamluk epochs" in *The Cambridge History of Egypt, Volume One: Islamic Egypt, 640-1517,* ed. C.F. Petry, 422.
[19] Lane, *An Arabic-English Lexicon* (Beirut: Librairie du Liban, 1863-1893), 776. For Kazimirski, the primary meaning of the verb *khafā* is even "faire paraître au grand jour", while *khafiya* bears the meanings of hiddenness. It should be noted that both Lane and Kazimirski only note these meanings of "appearance" for the verbal forms, and not for the adjective. For the adjective they both enumerate a number of meanings linked to concealedness, conspicuousness and faintness, although Kazimirski defines *khafī* in the first place as "latent", which the Larousse dictionary for its part defines as "Qui existe de manière diffuse, sans être apparent, *mais qui peut à tout moment se manifester*." http://www.larousse.fr/dictionnaires/francais/latent_latente/46362 Italics mine.

meanings were of course the types of lexical peculiarities of Arabic which literary discourse of the time gratefully expanded upon. The phrase *al-Alṭāf al-khafiyya* itself seems to have been less common however. Ḥajjī Khalīfa lists one work that is similarly entitled *al-Alṭāf al-khafiyya fī ashrāf al-Ḥanafiyya* by a certain Majd al-Dīn al-Fīrūzabādī.[20] It seems to have been either a work of Ḥanafī *fiqh*[21] or a biographical dictionary of Ḥanafī *fuqahāʾ*.[22] In any case, Ibn ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir likely intentionally used this phrase for its slightly ambiguous and semiotically wide ranging meanings, a common rhetorical practice.[23] Considering the titles of other works by Ibn ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir and Shāfiʿ b. ʿAlī, I choose to render the title as "The benevolences manifest through the noble *sīra* of the sultan al-Malik al-Ashraf", as I believe Ibn ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir most likely wanted to convey the idea that this *sīra* would convey benevolences, and not actually conceal them.

Another important word used in this title is "*sharīfa*", which I have here rendered as "noble". The range of meaning is however more broad, as may be expected, and has general connotations of social high-rankingness and noble distinction. The basic meaning is in fact related to genealogical distinction: the contemporary lexicographer Ibn Manẓūr for example typifies the basic meaning of the term "*sharaf*" as "*al-ḥasab bi-l-ābāʾ*", that is "nobility through parentage".[24] This connotation seems crucial for this title, as this is the only *sīra* written by this author about a sultan who ascended the throne by inheritance, by simply being the son of the previous sultan. Unfortunately, the only surviving part of this text is a fragment dealing with events when the sultan was already firmly in power, so we have no way of ascertaining how our author translated this idea in a possible narrative arch of rightful position through inheritance, perhaps engaging with the powerful signifiers *ḥasab* ("distinction", "merit") and *nasab* ("descent", "genealogy").[25]

This title is the first of our corpus in which the preposition *min* is used as connection between the guiding and thematic phrases. Like with *bi-,* the connection established by way of this word is much stronger than *fī,* as it not only stresses that the sultan's "benevolences" will be reflected *in* the work, but also *through* or *by way* of the work. The work itself becomes once more instrumental in achieving the manifestation of grace. The title is also distinctive for the fact that *sīra* is specified by way of adjective

[20] *Kashf al-ẓunūn*, 1:149.
[21] Qamar Shaʿbān al-Nidawī, "Al-Fīrūzabādī wa-l-qāmūs al-muḥīt", http://www.nidaulhind.com/2017/03/blog-post_14.html
[22] See the second post on this forum: http://www.aslein.net/showthread.php?t=6513 In my opinion the title suggests this is the more likely option.
[23] I believe this is what al-Nabulsī would consider to be *kināya*, or "concomitance" (metonymy). See: ʿAbd al-Ghanī al-Nābulsī, *The Arch Rhetorician,* 64.
[24] Ibn Manẓūr, *Lisān al-ʿarab,* 2241.
[25] On this issue, see: A. Asfaruddin, *Excellence and Precedence: Medieval Discourse on Legitimate Leadership* (Leiden: Brill, 2002) and L. Marlow, "Ḥasab o Nasab", *EIr.*

renderings of the sultan's name, i.e. in the forms of a *nisba* – we have come across a similar variant above in the body text of *Tashrīf al-ayyām*. Of course the simpler form by way of names and nouns would not rhyme, so it was necessary to use a variant form with adjectives.

4.1.4 al-Faḍl al-maʾthūr min sīrat al-sulṭān al-Malik al-Manṣūr

I render the title of the first *sīra* written by Shāfiʿ b. ʿAlī as "The merit transmitted through the *sīra* of al-Malik al-Manṣūr". The semantic web created by the word "*faḍl*" has been discussed above, but the association with *maʾthūr* draws it into a different construction. *Maʾthūr* is derived from the root letters ʾ-*th*-*r* with a basic meaning of "transmission", and a quite pronounced link to traces of time past. It occurs especially commonly in the context of *ḥadīth* transmission.[26] The use of this signification in Shāfiʿ's title is rather significant, as it lends the title a claim to the authority of transmitted knowledge. This authority is not just namedropped, but is actively used as a connector between *faḍl,* that is, "benefit" or "merit", and the *sīra,* by way of which this transmission is achieved. This connotation is once more strengthened by use of the preposition *min*: we may see the title as consisting of a guiding phrase and a thematic phrase, but it is just as much possible to read this again as a single phrase communicating the idea of merit transmitted (to the reader) by way of this *sīra*.

4.1.5 Ḥusn al-manāqib al-sirriyya al-muntazaʿa min al-sīra al-Ẓāhiriyya

In the other *sīra* written by Shāfiʿ b. ʿAlī of which we know the title for certain, the idea of the centrality of *sīra* is taken even further than in the previous titles. We may render the title as "The excellence of the confidential virtues derived (or extracted) from the sīra of al-Ẓāhir [Baybars]". This title, which contains a rather exceptionally long thematic phrase,[27] is built around number of very powerful and commonly used words in titles. Ḥajjī Khalīfa lists twenty-seven titles of various works starting with *ḥusn* (Shāfiʿ's is not included) and about fifty starting with *manāqib* ("virtues") — doubtlessly many more titles may be added if we also count those that contain this word after the first noun. The latter term is often taken as a genre of "biographical works of a

[26] One example of another appearance of the word in a book title is Jalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūṭī's *al-Durr al-manthūr fī l-tafsīr al-maʾthūr,* a commentary on the Qurʾān (*tafsīr*). It has been edited by Ṭāriq Fathī (Beirut: Dār al-kutub al-ʿilmiyyā, 2010), 7 volumes.
[27] Ambros counted only nine titles which contained two adjectives in their guiding phrases. "Beobachtungen", 34.

laudatory nature, which have eventually become a part of hagiographical literature in Arabic, in Persian and in Turkish".[28] Charles Pellat notes that in the early Islamic period the term would often be used interchangeably with such terms as *faḍāʾil, mafākhir* and *maʾāthir* – note the similarity to *maʾthūr* just above. That (variants of) two of these terms, as well as *manāqib* appear in the titles of our *sīras* — with *sīra* itself also a term often found in conjunction with these signifiers — is important: the idea that such terms highlighted the exemplary and laudatory nature of the contents clearly still resonated in the period during which our authors wrote. *Ḥusn* itself is less intimately related to a genre or a set of discourses, but reappears extremely often (as does the derived form "*iḥsān",* "beneficence") throughout the *sīra*'s, especially as a signifier in descriptions praising the sultan's performance of ideal rule

While the two first terms of the title are recognisable and unsurprising in this text, the two next terms are more peculiar. The use of *sirriyya,* or "secret" may seem strange but in the context of *inshāʾī* writing it is yet again a powerful signifier which I will return to more extensively in 6.1.2. Here it can be read in a number of ways: *al-manāqib al-sirriyya* may denote the sultan's confidential virtues which would announce this text as a harbinger of little known facts about the sultan's life and rule, but *sirriyya* also denoted a particular type of *inshāʾ* writing — most famous from the office of *kātib al-sirr,* or "confidential secretary". As I have detailed above, it is unclear when this office precisely originated, but by the time Shāfiʿ finished this particular text — the manuscript is explicitly dated to 716 / 1316 — the office was well established. Considering that Shāfiʿ here abridged a *sīra* written by a renowned *kātib* from a previous generation, one may interpret the *manāqib al-sirriyya* as denoting the virtues of *inshāʾ* as written by a *kātib al-sirr.*[29] However, while this could then be read as a title praising Ibn ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir's undertaking, Shāfiʿ adds a crucial word to highlight his own agency: these virtues are not inherent to the original *sīra,* they are "derived from", even "extracted from" (*muntazaʿa min* — see my remarks above about the use of "*min*" in these titles) the *sīra al-Ẓāhiriyya*, brought out to their full potential by Shāfiʿ by the act of composing a *mukhtaṣar,* an "abridgement" of the original work.

[28] C. Pellat "Manāḳib", *EI2.*

[29] It is likely an anachronism to call Ibn ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir a *kātib al-sirr,* but several authors contemporary to Shāfiʿ as well as Shāfiʿ himself (although ambiguously) do name Ibn ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir as *kātib al-sirr*. See also 6.1.2.

4.1.6 Sīrat al-Malik al-Nāṣir / Naẓm al-jawāhir fī sīrat al-Malik al-Nāṣir

The single surviving manuscript of Shāfiʿ b. ʿAlī's work on al-Nāṣir Mūḥammad is missing its title page, and the rather unhelpful title added on the manuscript's cover page (*Tārīkh al-salāṭīn [wa-l-mulūk] wa-l-ʿasākir,* "The history of the sultans, kings, and armies") is doubtlessly a later ascription, perhaps added by a book seller. In the *ijāza* (permission to transmit) he received from Shāfiʿ, al-Ṣafadī lists two works that may be identified as this work: *Naẓm al-jawāhir fī sīrat al-Malik al-Nāṣir* and another one named simply *Sīrat al-Malik al-Nāṣir.* Considering the fact that *naẓm* usually denoted "verse" or "poetry", which would suggest a *sīra* in verse — which this manuscript despite its stylistic inclinations most certainly is not — and especially that al-Ṣafadī specifies that this work was written *naẓman* ("in verse"), the manuscript must be identified with the simple title *Sīrat al-Malik al-Nāṣir.*

There is some evidence of another work written by our author with a similar title as *Naẓm al-jawāhir fī sīrat al-Malik al-Nāṣir*: *Naẓm al-sulūk fī tawārīkh al-khulafāʾ wa-l-mulūk,* apparently a universal history, some excerpts of which are quoted by the eighth / fourteenth century historian Ibn al-Furāt (about whom, see a more extensive discussion in 7.2.1.2.) in those sections of his work that deal with the Fatimids.[30] Perhaps surprisingly, this work is not listed under this name or any other one in the otherwise very detailed list of works written by our author recorded by al-Ṣafadī,[31] and Claude Cahen's claim that the quotes found in Ibn al-Furāt's work are mostly derivative of other authors would be quite atypical for Shāfiʿ's historiographical approach as seen in the *sīra*'s, so Ibn al-Furāt's attribution may have been mistaken here. The title does highlight the flexible use of *naẓm* in titles outside of poetry contexts however.

4.2 Introducing a *sīra*

Despite the prominent position of introductions at the start of the majority of books written in the Arabic-Islamic textual tradition, only very few detailed analyses of them have been undertaken. Many researchers have been content to focus only on a small number of extracts from such introductions which may be brought into direct relation

[30] C. Cahen, "Quelques chroniques anciennes relatives aux derniers Fatimides", *Bulletin de l'institut français d'archéologie orientale,* 37 (1937), 25.
[31] Al-Ṣafadī, *Aʿyān al-aṣr,* 2:507.

with other parts of the texts.[32] Indeed, one may see in the common approach to these sections a practice derived from this idea expressed by Peter Freimark:

> In vielen Fällen könnte man [das Vorwort] bei der Lektüre des Werkes übergehen und sich diesem sofort zuwenden, man würde das Werk dennoch in allen Einzelheiten verstehen.[33]

Clearly, most scholars who have studied the texts in this corpus are guilty of such an approach: while nearly all these texts have been mined extensively for historical data, to my knowledge only P.M. Holt and Anne Troadec have devoted some attention to the introductions, without however considering the interplay between several parts of their discursive constructions, which has lead to a number of important misinterpretations of our authors' discourses. In the following I present a detailed and analytical study of the three preserved introductions, in which I focus especially on the logical trajectory of the argument. I will also already suggest a number of ways in which we can read these introductions in relation to the body text following them and in relation to the titles of the works.

4.2.1 Ibn ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir

At least one initial page is missing from the British Library manuscript of Ibn ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir's *sīra* of Baybars, and its first extant page has its lower part cut off. Despite these lacunae, a substantial part of the introduction has still been preserved, so we can form a

[32] The only sustained study on introductions I know of is Peter Freimark's metastudy "Das Vorwort als literarische Form in der arabischen Literatur" (Unpublished PhD thesis, Westfalischen Wilhelms-Universität zu Münster, 1967). While this study offers much valuable data, it is not really analytical but essentially descriptive, and it is quite problematic in its approach to Arabic rhetoric by way of a background in Antique Greco-Latin rhetoric. The *taḥmīd* or "laudatory preamble" which in two of the three cases discussed below were intimately interwoven with the remainder of the introductions, has recently received some more detailed scrutiny in Aziz K. Qutbuddin, "A Literary Analysis of *Taḥmīd*: A Relational Approach for Studying the Arabic-Islamic Laudatory Preamble", in *Reflections on Knowledge and Language in Middle Eastern Societies,* eds. Hussain Qutbuddin, Yonatan Mendel & Bruno De Nicola (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2010), 63-89.

[33] Freimark, "Das Vorwort", 12. Freimark does argue for the value of these sections, though not so much in relation to the rest of the work, as in relation to "der Wirklichkeit", i.e. as an expression of authors' contemporary anxieties and experiences. It should also be noted that he predominantly studied introductions from the third / ninth to sixth / twelfth centuries — although he also looked at introductions by among others al-Suyūṭī, al-Maqrīzī, al-Dhahabī and Ibn Khaldūn.

fairly good idea of how the author conceptualised his undertaking.[34] Sadly, aside from the last line or so, its *taḥmīd* section has not been preserved, so we do not know how our author interwove his praise of God, the Prophet and his family with the subject matter of his work, as we will be able to do below for the two extant introductions written by Shāfiʿ b. ʿAlī. The first fully preserved lines run as follows:

> وبعد فإنه لما كانت السيرة طراز الدول * ومرآةً يرى الناظر فيها أحوال الملوك الأول * وشهادةً على ما يحسن كل منهم أو يسيء فيه من قول وعمل * وبها يعلم الناس كيف تصرّمت الأيام وتصرّفت * وبماذا جرت وتوقفت * وعلى ماذا أقبلت عليه من خير وشرّ وتقفّت * فلم تخل دولة من الدول من مؤرخ يسطر أخبارها * ويودع الصحف آثارها *
>
> Now then, since sīra has been a model for *dawla*'s, a mirror in which the spectator may see the power of the first kings, and a testimony of the benefactions and evils each of them committed in words and deeds — and by it people may be informed about how the days elapsed and turned about, by which [causes events] were brought about or averted, and why they were filled with goodness and badness or [why they] stopped — [it follows that] no dawla whatsoever could exist without a chronicler to write down its accounts and entrust its traces to paper.[35]

In this opening sentence Ibn ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir connects two of the main elements of his discourse: the oft-repeated notion of history as a model (*ṭirāz*)[36] and exemplar for later generations, and the perhaps more innovative idea that the history of a *dawla* can only exist by the grace of a historian (*muʾarrikh*) who writes it down. This last part of the statement will prove to be crucial for the text's construction, for Ibn ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir creates a gap that needs to be filled by way of this claim: he will in the following lines describe in laudatory fashion the sultanate of Baybars, but following from its opening claim this reign can in fact only achieve its supposed greatness if it is committed to

[34] The more fully preserved Istanbul manuscript of the text does not contain the opening section.

[35] *Rawḍ*, 45. My translation is a revised version of the one found in ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz al-Khuwayṭir's unpublished PhD dissertation, but differs in a number of crucial parts. Perhaps the most important difference here is that I have chosen to translate *lammā* as "since" and not as an introductory statement (rendered by al-Khuwayṭir as "as it were"). I believe that the *lammā* introduces a conditional sentence — especially as it is preceded by *fa-inna-hu.* The condition is then resolved by the *fa-lam takhalla dawlatun* on the last line. While the difference in translation is perhaps subtle, it does highlight the strong interconnectedness of these statements, which I believe to have been Ibn ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir's intention. *Translation,* 2:311.

[36] Rendered by Khuwayṭir as "adornment", which is equally possible, especially considering its common use for the calligraphic band identifying a patron on textiles and buildings (see among others M. Ekhtiar & J. Cohen, "*Tiraz:* Inscribed Textiles from the Early Islamic Period" in *Heilbrunn Timeline of Art History* (New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2000) in http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/tira/hd_tira.htm (July 2015)). However, I have chosen a translation that resonated more with the following statements. Of course, the ambiguity was very likely intended here, and one should keep both meanings in mind.

paper by a chronicler. As such, Ibn ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir lays out the three main elements of his argument in one powerful programmatic sentence: the exemplarity of history in general, the specific exemplarity of this particular sultan's life and deeds, and the crucial role of the historian as guardian of historical merit. The remainder of the introduction may be seen as an elaboration of this three-sided argument for the superiority of his biographical project.

The directly following part of the introduction explicitly connects the opening claims to the subject matter of the *sīra* in a fairly lengthy praise on the exceptionality of Baybars' *dawla,* which is compared favourably to the rules of earlier rulers. The factor of *dawla* introduced in the opening sentence and the edifying function of *sīra* are thus directly associated with the rulership of Baybars. There is a part missing after the first lines of this praise, but the narrative picks up again with a specific comparison: an unidentified ruler (either Quṭuz or Tūrānshāh) is portrayed negatively as unwilling to fight and quick to flee. The lack of a heroic ruler is then lamented and the ascension of Baybars praised as a resolution of this problem. This contrasting of good and bad practice and the sultan's ascension as resolution for a problematic situation will continue to be the driving narrative force for the first part of the *sīra*, which immediately follows the introduction. I will return to this in elaborate detail below in 5.2.1.

In concluding his praise of Baybars' victorious rule, Ibn ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir claims that:

> و كان ما سيذكر في مكانه * و يستقصى في بيانه * وجب أن تُسطّر سيرتها لتبقى على ممرّ الأيام * وتكتب حسناتها وإن كانت قد كتبتها الملائكة الكرام * وكان المملوك الأصغر مشاهدها سفراً وحضراً * ومعايناً لا خبراً * والمطّلع على غوامض أسرارها * وتسطر مبارها *

> [As such,] that which will be mentioned in its place and which will be clearly explained,[37] necessitated that a *sīra* of [the sultan's victories and achievements] should be written so that [the memory of them] may remain [known] throughout the passage of time, and so that its good works may be recorded — though the noble angels have already listed them. This humble servant was an eyewitness of these events, traveling and attending [at court], beholding them himself and not being told about them. He is acquainted with its innermost secrets and the recording of its good work.[38]

[37] I believe Ibn ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir is here abstractly referring to Baybars' life and rule.
[38] *Rawḍ*, 46. Translation again rather fundamentally emended from *Translation,* 312. There might an ambiguous play on words happening here between *malāʾika* (angels) and *mamlūk* (here rendered as servant), both of which derive from the root letters *m-l-k*.

This passage immediately following an enumeration of Baybars' heroic qualities establishes a chain of necessities that will prove to be crucial in the *sīra*'s grand construction and which once more wraps up the three-part argument of its discourse introduced in the opening sentence. The sultan's achievements being so important, their being written down becomes a necessity according to the edifying and commemorative logic of the introduction — here again repeated as the fundamental goal of a *sīra*. But whereas the initial introduction stated simply that this results in the necessity of a chronicler (*muʾarrikh*) for every self-respecting *dawla*, this is taken a crucial step further here: Ibn ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir nominates *himself* as the ideal chronicler, for he has unparalleled inside knowledge of the history and the workings of the sultanate. If Baybars' idealised sultanate requires the writing of an ideal history, then Ibn ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir is the ideal historian to undertake this task.

As such, Ibn ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir set the tone for a *sīra* that would showcase the exemplarity of a specific sultan. Its ambition was to join the loftiest group of exemplary historical works, and, perhaps most importantly, it had the right credentials in the form of its accomplished author. Considering the specific nature of this introduction and its immediate relevance for Ibn ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir's project of writing a *sīra* of a sultan whom he directly served, it is very unlikely that this particular part has come down to us in an altered version. Whether or not the later parts of the text exist in a similarly unaltered state remains opaque, but I will consider this to be the case at least in general terms.

4.2.2 Shāfiʿ b. ʿAlī

In comparison to Ibn ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir's surviving work, we are comparably lucky with the writings of Shāfiʿ b. ʿAli: two of the three known manuscripts of his *sīra*'s have come down to us more or less in full, which allows us to study the relation between his introductions and his texts in more detail. I will start with his introduction to *al-Faḍl al-maʾthūr* which I believe to be the earlier of the two and which resonates most directly with the subject matter, as *Ḥusn al-manāqib* reframes these types of discourse in the context of the specific format of an abridgement.

4.2.2.1 al-Faḍl al-maʾthūr min sīrat al-sulṭān al-Malik al-Manṣūr [Qalāwūn]

Like nearly every Islamic text, *al-Faḍl* starts with a *taḥmīd* or "praise" section. Authors in the Middle Period increasingly started using the format as one part of the literary communicative project in their introductions. In this particular case, Praise for God is interwoven with gratitude for His gift of a good king to the Islamic community. I have newly edited the Arabic by comparing the manuscript to the two available editions, both of which have their fair share of problems, as will be noted in footnotes.

الحمد لله الذي أعزّ الإسلام وأهله بأعزّ سلطان * وجبّاهم[39] منه بمن وقف عند أمر الله فلم يتجاوز في حكمه العدل وفي إقتداره الإحسان * وخوّلهم خير مَلِك يكبره العيان * ويتنزه في منظره ويتمتع بمخبره كل إنسان * وأراد بهم خيرًا فولي عليهم خيارهم ففرن الإقتتان من جميل خَلقِه وخُلقِه بالإقتان[40] * وجعلهم رَعية لخير راع لم يزالوا من عنايته بأعزّ مكان * وعمّهم بفيض إنعامه حتى غدى المُقِلّ بسوابغها وهو ذو إمكان ونحمده على جزيل الامتنان *

Praise be to God who strengthened Islam and its people by the mightiest sultan; and [who] gave them by him someone who occupied himself with God's decree and who did not overstep justice in his judgment and beneficence in his potency; [praise be to Him who] bestowed on them the benefit of a king who is praised by eyewitnesses; the view of whom amuses and the intrinsic significance [*makhbar*] of whom blesses every person; who strives for them [to achieve] goodness; so he commanded the best of them over them, and brought them to flourishing (*iqtiyān*) by way of the beauty of his creation and his noble character being as an adornment; who makes them into a herd of the best shepherd who do not stop taking the best place as far as his concern is concerned; who encompasses them by the abundance of his kindness so that [even] the destitute is amply taken care for, for he is endowed with great power. We praise Him with the most plentiful gratitude.[41]

The immediate start of the *sīra* is as such framed in laudatory language: not only towards God as is required of any text in the Islamic tradition, but also towards the sultan whose life and actions will be the main subject of the text. Shāfiʿ's use of the *taḥmīd* section to creatively interweave his subject matter with the laudation is certainly not unique, but it is a very good example of how an author may use it to move far beyond the literal meaning of his words and the subject matter they introduce. The impressive linguistic and rhetorical dexterity shown here by Shāfiʿ can be seen as a first taster of the mastery of language to follow throughout the rest of the text, the majority

[39] Tadmurī (*Faḍl,* 23) reads "*jabala-hum*" ("to create, to mould") and Lewicka (195) "*ḥabā-hum*" ("he awarded them"), both of which do not follow the manuscript's orthography which reads "*jabā-hum*". I have slightly altered this by reading this as a second verbal form (I am thus disregarding the manuscript's sole use of *fatḥa* in the vocalisation and adding a *shadda*), which has a meaning related to prostration and in this particular written form of "he gave to them" (though apparently a "vulgar" form, which would not be atypical for manuscripts in this period). Lane, *An Arabic-English Lexicon,* 378.

[40] These last two words are partly covered by a piece of paper in the manuscript. Tadmurī reads *wa-khalqat-hu bi-l-iqtān* (*Faḍl,* 23) and Lewicka (195) *khulqa-hu l-iqtitān,* both of which either add or omit letters from the manuscript's orthography. I instead choose to read it as *wa-khulqi-hi bi-l-iqtān,* also a tentative reading and translation, but following the manuscript's phrasing and the logic of paronomasia in which an author would not use the exact same word twice in a row unless different meanings are intended. I derive the meaning of *iqtān* as "adornment" from the root letters *q-y-n,* as in *Tāj al-ʿarūs*, vol. 36:34-35.

[41] Bodleian Library Oxford MS Marsh 424, 1v.

of which is written in rhymed prose. It is as if he interweaves three types of praise here: of God, of the sultan, and, implicitly, of language itself.

This last observation is confirmed by how Shāfiʿ next goes on to write three lines as a variation of the Islamic proclamation of faith (*shahāda*). Shāfiʿ sticks fairly strictly to the standard form of this obligatory part of any introduction, but his variation adds one interesting detail by expressing the wish that the prayers for the Prophet "may remain [couched in] the sweetness of the tongue" (*lā tazāla ḥilyatu l-lisāni*). One can see that this sweetness of the tongue would be considered to be a quality of poets and *kuttāb* and thus connects with the *sīra*'s stylistic objectives. The preceding lines' association of praise for God with praise for the sultan in a language so dense with rhetorical flourishes that the text almost automatically becomes a performative literary text, is here more explicitly framed in terms that connect this discourse to the language register applied throughout the text, even without recourse to dazzling prose.

As such, before the author has even delved into the specific subject matter of the text he has already signposted the two central stakes of his project: the text as laudatory portrait of the sultan, *and* as a vehicle for Shāfiʿ's masterful command of the Arabic language. The rest of the introduction develops these stakes in further detail, adding to it the specific notion of the importance of *sīra*:

وبعد فإن سير الملوك الصيد نزهة من (سمر)[42] * وذكرى مَن أذكر * وعبرة لمَن اعتبر * و أعوذ (...) مثاله * ودليل على سداد الملك في أقواله وأفعاله * وهي[43] عنوان سطور علاه ودَرج لا بل دُرج مودع ثمين حلاه وشاهد بحزمه * ومُوضِح قوة عزمه * وسمير يؤنَس بحديثه * وجليس يستفهم منه كنه قديم عز سلطانه وحديثه * لا سيما إذا كان ملكًا همامًا * وسلطانًا فضلت أيامه بالعدل والإحسان أيامًا فأيامًا * وخوادًا إن استمطر كفّه كان غمامًا * وإن اعتبرت قلائد مِننه اتّسقت نظامًا * وإن ذُكّرَت[44] فروسيته * كانت أعلا نت عنتر وعبسيتة * ومن البطال وفروسيته * وإن تلمحت أراؤه ألفي الصواب مكتنفًا بجوانبها * والسداد محيطًا بمذاهبها * كمولانا السلطان الملك المنصور

[42] Tentative filling of a gap in the manuscript by the verb *samara* — an oft-used term by Shāfiʿ, he even uses the derived form *samīr* a few lines below — which would work in the rhyme pattern of the following phrases. I have not been able to come up with a plausible filling for the next line where probably about two words are obscured due to this gap.

[43] Reading *hiya* instead of *huwa* as Tadmurī does (*Faḍl*, 23). Perhaps he corrected it to a male form because the following word is male, but I believe the female form denotes the two directly preceding plural forms. The text then, perhaps rather unusually, makes a singular male word the predicate of these plural forms. Lewicka adheres to the manuscript's female form.

[44] Tadmurī reads this as *dhukirat* (*Faḍl*, 23) and Lewicka as *dh-k-rta* (196, only the last consonant vocalised), both of which do not agree with the manuscript's orthography which has a clear *shadda* on the *kāf,* and a *fatḥa* on the *rāʾ*. I thus read it as a second form third person singular female.

> Now then: The *sīra*'s of strong-willed kings[45] are a diversion to who [passes the night in listening], a reminder to who bears in mind [the examples of previous rulers]; an admonition to who takes warnings. It places [...] his example under God's protection; as it is [also] a proof of the appositeness of the king's sayings and deeds – and these are a model for the lines of writing dealing with his exaltedness; a paper, nay, a box in which his precious sweetness is deposited; a testimony to his resoluteness; a clarification of the strength of his determination; an intimate conversation partner telling [delightful stories]; and a table companion who inquires in detail about the greatness of [the ruler's] power both in the past and in the present. [And this is] especially the case if he were a magnanimous king, a sultan whose days were blessed with justice and beneficence for a long time [*ayyāman fa-ayyāman*], and so generous that if his open hand would ask for rain, a cloud [would appear]. And if the necklaces of his graces were to be considered they would be of a well-ordered system; and if his horsemanship [*furūsiyya*] is pointed out [that is because] it was greater than that of ʿAntar and his ʿAbsiyya [tribe] as well as Baṭṭāl and his heroism; and if his opinions would be glanced at, the correct opinion would be found surrounded by its various aspects, and the right thing encircled by its ways of attaining it; such a [ruler is] our lord the sultan, al-Malik al-Manṣūr[46]

If the *taḥmīd* had not sufficiently highlighted Shāfiʿ's rhetorical prowess, then this next section certainly would have done so. The web of significations spun here is intricate and dense indeed: Qur'ānic concepts (*dhikr*, *ʿibra*), terms central to descriptions of ideal rule (*ʿadl, iḥsān, quwwa, ʿazm*), and expressions related to the contexts of literary performance (*jalīs, samīr*) are associatively bound together. But there is a logical build-up here, a clear evolution of the subject matter. Whereas the first lines of the section deal with the classical idea of biographies of kings (*siyar al-mulūk*) as works that communicate exemplarity, closely related to concepts of remembrance and forbearance, this gradually makes way for their value as entertaining reading material, and eventually concludes with a panegyric to an as yet unnamed king. The following section takes that to more specific terrain and continues in the same vein but this time by explicitly naming Qalāwūn as an example of such a king. This is done via the connecting prefix *ka-* ("like", "such as"), which clearly establishes the relationship between these two subjects within a continuous discourse, considering the necessary

[45] *Siyar al-mulūk al-ṣīd*: in which the last word denotes the "fixedness of the face of a king, so that it does not turn aside to the right or left, by reason of pride." Lane, *An Arabic-English Lexicon*, 1753.
[46] Bodleian MS Marsh 424, 1v-2r.

usage of *ka-* between two (equal) things that are compared.[47] After a dividing mark, a short poem of three lines building upon themes set forth in the preceding lines follows — the sultan as receiver of Godly sent rain, the duality of time,[48] and the sultan being admired by his flock. To conclude, in the last section Shāfiʿ wraps up the discourse by looping back towards the author himself and his writing as one of the two central nodes of the *sīra*:

وكنت قد باشرتُ خدمته كاتب إنشاء سفرًا وحضرًا * ووردًا وصدرًا * ومعاني وصُوَرًا * وآياتٍ وسُوَرًا * وخُبرًا وخَبرًا * وتأثيرًا وأثرًا * وكتبتُ عنه سرًّ وجهرًا * وشهدتُ وقائه برًا وبحرًا * وأطلعتُ على ما لم يَطلع عليه غيري بمشافهته * وعلمتُ من أحواله ما ام يعلمه إلا كاتب سره بوساطة مشاركته * وحضرت مهادنته وموادعته * وكتبت بما استقر منها وحررت نسخ الإيمان له وعليه * وأوضحت من شكوكها مُبهِمها عند المثول بين يديه[49] * فأوجب على ذلك أن أسطره محاسن أيامه الزاهرة * وأن أثباتها لتغدو على ألسِنة الأقلام الدوام والإستمرار سائرة * وأنا أشرع بالله التوفيق

I have attended him in service as *kātib of inshāʾ*, both traveling and attending [at court],[50] arriving and leaving, [composing writings appropriate] in meaning and in form, [which are embellished] with [Qurʾānic] verses and *sūra's*, relying on knowledge and reporting, establishing influences and works of art. I wrote for him in secret and publicly, I witnessed his battles on land and at sea, and I was informed of things that nobody else but me has seen because he told them to me personally. I was informed about his situations such as no-one knew except his *kātib al-sirr* [who knows these things] by means of his [professional] partnership [with the sultan]. I was present at his settlements of peace and reconciliations. I wrote down what he decided in these matters, and accurately rendered the copies of oaths he gave or received, and I clarified what was ambiguous in their uncertainties during audiences [I had] in his presence. Because of that I was obliged to write down on paper the merits of his radiant days and to establish

[47] Tadmurī (*Faḍl,* 24) starts a new paragraph starting with this *ka-*, though the dividing space present in the manuscript suggests only a change in rhyme pattern. In fact, the new paragraph in this context is slightly misleading, as it delineates two subjects whereas the argument runs continuous in the original text.

[48] Here focusing on the classic duality of sun and moon, which is also a salient feature of the Qurʾānic discourse on time. See among other instances Qurʾān 39:5.

[49] This is a marginal addition which Tadmurī (*Faḍl* 23) adds after فأوجب على ذلك أن أسطّره , as the insertion seems to immediately follow the end of the line in the manuscript. Thus he implies that Shāfiʿ wrote the text and then presented it in audiences. However, this is incorrect, it should be inserted after وأوضحت من شكوكها مبهمه, considering the *signe-de-renvoi* in the manuscript as well as the text's rhyming patterns (*yaday-hi — ʿalay-hi*). Lewicka (198) does this correctly.

[50] The exact same phrase is used in Ibn ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir's introduction above, but notice how Shāfiʿ expands upon the theme, especially by adding various forms of paronomasia, as it were in an effort to outdo his uncle. The phrase itself seems to have been a common expression, see for another use by Ibn Faḍl Allāh al-ʿUmarī, *Masālik al-abṣār,* vol. 12:193.

these things so that they may be permanently and enduringly fed to the tongues of the pens. By the aid of God I commence.[51]

This passage has received some attention, notably from Anne Troadec, who also translated it into French.[52] However, in her translation she followed Tadmurī's edition, which contains a crucial reading mistake concerning a marginal insertion which adds "during the audiences [I had] in his presence" (*ʿinda l-muthūli bayna yaday-hi*) after Shāfiʿ's claim of having been obliged to write the *sīra*. In accordance with the text's rhyming patterns, and following a quite clearly written *signe-de-renvoi* in the manuscript, the insertion needs to be added slightly earlier in which Shāfiʿ is still writing about his professional interaction with the sultan, and claims that he clarified the contents of oaths in audiences. The following argument of necessity or obligation is thus highly similar to the one made by Ibn ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir and certainly not proof that this was "a commissioned work".[53] Here too, the necessity to write this text derives not from a request, but from Shāfiʿ's claim to a unique insider perspective on the happenings due to his close professional relation to the sultan as one of his most prominent scribes. While Shāfiʿ will at one point in this text note that he offered a part of it to the sultanic library, he never writes that he actually *performed* it in the sultan's presence. Shāfiʿ's claim to historiographic superiority does not arise from such a literal sense of performance, but from the fact that the text performs his centrality to the sultan's political project as scribe, and for that his language ability is the primary tool.

4.2.2.2 Ḥusn al-manāqib al-sirriyya l-muntazaʿa min al-sīra l-Ẓāhiriyya[54]

The other text of Shāfiʿ of which the introduction has been preserved is framed in a specific type of discourse that is slightly different from that of *al-Faḍl al-maʾthūr*. As already noted, *Ḥusn al-manāqib* is a reworking of the earlier *sīra* written by Ibn ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir. Yet, while Shāfiʿ thus had to address the important issue of Ibn ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir's earlier text upon which his own was based, his discourse is still firmly embedded within the elements seen in the two previous introductions, and he is able to relate the central discursive elements of the earlier introductions to his specific project. It is furthermore noteworthy that Shāfiʿ entirely excised his uncle's original introduction from the *sīra*

[51] Bodleian MS Marsh 424, 2v-3r; *Faḍl,* 24; Lewicka, 197-198.
[52] A. Troadec, "Les Mamelouks dans l'espace syrien", 80-81.
[53] "L'ouvrage apparaît clairement comme une commande." Troadec, "Les Mamelouks dans l'espace syrien", 81.
[54] Excerpts of this introduction have been translated before by P.M. Holt in "Some Observations on Shāfiʿ b. ʿAlī's Biography of Baybars", 124-125. I have used his translations as an initial reference, but my rendering differs significantly.

and wrote a completely new one which is in the first place self-referential and only in the last lines explicitly notes the text's origins as an abridgement of an earlier text.

In this introduction, Shāfiʿ does not start with praising the sultan, but embeds within his *taḥmīd* a praise of historical narration.

> الحمد لله الذي احيا ذكر الملوك بأيامهم الزاهرة * وسيرهم التي هي بتفاصيل أحوالهم سائرة * وأشهد حلية أحوالهم التي هي بمناقبهم حالية * وطرّز حلل معاليهم بإثبات هممهم العالية * نحمده على وافر نعمه * ونستزيده من مواد كرمه *

> Praise be to God who lends life to the narration (*dhikr*) of the kings by their resplendent days, and to their biographies (*siyar-hum*) which are driven by the details of their conditions, and it testifies of the essence of their circumstances which are by their virtues (*bi-manāqibi-him*) pleasant, who embroiders[55] the clothes of their noble things with the assertion of their exalted endeavours. We praise Him for his abundant blessings, and we ask Him to give more plentiful of the affection of his generosity.[56]

Shāfiʿ's choice to start his book with these lines suggests that his appraisal of the work's topic is, even more than in *Faḍl,* not so much about the sultan, as it is about the writing of *sīra* itself. The functions of informing and remembering are praised here, but not directly related to the memory of the sultan himself, he is not even specifically mentioned. After a few lines that do not connect the *taḥmīd* explicitly with the subject matter, Shāfiʿ's start of the specific introduction even continues in the same unspecific vein.

> وبعد فإن في إثبات سير الملوك ما يشهد الغائب * ويعيد الذاهب * ويوقف على أحوال المعاصر وغير المُعاصر * ويمتع بحسن المسامرة بما للوقائع من الموارد والمصادر وكان السلطان السعيد الشهيد الملك الظاهر ركن الدين بيبرس الصالحي قد ملك فأسجح * وسعي في ذات الله فأنجح * وقام بأعباء السلطنة أيما قيام * وسهر في إقامة منار الأسلام * والناس نيام *

> Now then, in establishing the *sīra*'s of kings there is what makes the absent one testify as though present and the one who departs return,[57] contemplates the situations of the one who is present and of the one who is past, and which carries away the one who listens in nightly conversation with the excellence of what is in

[55] Note however, the use of the verb *ṭaraza* and its connotations of being a "model" (see 4.3.1. above).
[56] *Ḥusn al-manāqib,* 53.
[57] Note the use of *dhāhib,* a derived form of the radicals *dh-h-b,* which were given as primary meaning of *s*īra by Ibn Manẓūr (see 4.1.).

> the happenings along roads and starting points. The sultan al-Malik al-Ẓāhir Rukn al-Dīn Baybars al-Ṣāliḥī, the radiant martyr, was possessed of power and acted with goodness,[58] proceeded in accordance with God[’s decree] and was given success. He took up the burdens of sultanship in whichever circumstances and passed the night in erecting the lighttower of Islam while the people slept [...][59]

The qualities of *sīra* here are rather harmonious with those expressed in *al-Faḍl al-maʾthūr* (and *al-Rawḍ al-zāhir* for that matter), and the earlier used metaphor of *sīra* as a nightly conversation partner ([*samara*] - *musāmara* - *samīr*) is even recycled. But there is an important difference: while the text implies a connection between the general statement at the outset and the specific praise of Baybars, it is not explicitly stated so. In Shāfiʿ’s praise for Qalāwūn, he used the prefix *ka*-, or “like”, to establish a connection between the general characteristics of an ideal ruler and the ways in which this specific sultan personified these virtues. Here, the ideal virtues are skipped and the text immediately transits from the statement about the worthiness of *sīra* to the excellence of Baybars. The stakes of this project are thus subtly made clear: this text is in the first place an exercise in a specific literary form, that of the *mukhtaṣar*, the abridgement of an earlier work. The praise of Baybars is not an unimportant element in that, as it was central to the original work, but it is not the main goal of this later author’s project. Holt has argued that Shāfiʿ could get away with writing in more critical tones about Baybars, because he probably did so during the third reign of al-Nāṣir Muḥammad when the image of Baybars did not loom large anymore, but perhaps a more important reason for his different perspective lies in the specific literary context in which he wrote about this sultan: it was not so much about writing a laudatory *sīra* anymore, it was about crafting an abridged *sīra* of a sultan, an exercise in conciseness and selection.

Of course, as the source text from which Shāfiʿ b. ʿAlī constructed his own variation was a laudatory *sīra*, Shāfiʿ’s own text could not simply excise such subject matter. The following lines of the introduction make that clear with a fairly extensive praise of Baybars’ specific virtues, the first lines of which I have translated above. It is certainly true that our author was a lot more critical of Baybars than he was of Qalāwūn throughout the text, but essentially he still praises Baybars with an especially pronounced focus on the martial character of his reign. The two final lines of this part contain a number of interesting word choices announcing a change in topic to follow:

[58] Lane, *An Arabic-English Lexicon,* 1316.

[59] *Ḥusn al-manāqib*, 53-54. Slight edits based on BnF MS Arabe 1707, 2v-3r. The praise for Baybars continues for several more lines but will be paraphrased below.

وأعدم المغل من التتار * وأخلى منهم الدار والجار * وأدّب بسيفه مَن جار * وأعلى كلمة الإيمان على رؤوس الأشهاد * وأنام الإسلام وأهله في أومن مهاد *

He wiped out the Tatar Mongols, and he removed them from the abode [of Islam] and the neighbor[ing parts], and he disciplined with his sword the one who deviated, he elevated the word of faith publicly, while mankind and the people of Islam were in the most peaceful place of rest.[60]

Two words may be singled out as significant here, the verbal form *addaba* (here translated as "disciplined", but could also be rendered as "edified"), and *kalima,* or "word". These two terms are central to the occupation of *kuttāb* and signpost a change of topic to follow shortly. The significance of "word" is almost self-evident, given the self-profiling of *kuttāb* as guardians of the written word. With the form *addaba* the literary and edifying endeavour of *adab* is even intensified by a second form of the verb, which implies a causative meaning. Its coupling with the *sayf,* or "sword", furthermore establishes a bridge between the martial character of the preceding lines and the praise of the *kātib* to follow, reminiscent of the discursive tradition of debates between pen and sword which I will discuss more extensively below. The following lines further develop this intersection of martial and writerly terminology:

وكان كاتب سره البليغ محيي الدين ابو الفضل عبد الله ابن شيخ الإسلام رشيد الدين عبد الظاهر قد افتتح أيامه بنظم سيرة رتل فيها سور محاسنه صورةً صورةً * وأرخ وقائعه التي هي في صحائف حسناته مسطورة * فأطال وأطاب * وخطب بأمتع خطاب * وأتى على مجموع أيامه يومًا يومًا وصرح بمناقبه وإلى إبداعها أومى * لكل إقتضى الحال أن يثبت منها الغث والسمين * وأن يكرر ما يشافه به سمع سلطانه من أطرا وإن كان فيه صادق لا يمين *

And his head of the chancery [*kātib sirri-hi*] was the eloquent Muḥyī al-Dīn Abū l-Faḍl ʿAbd al-Lāh b. Shaykh al-Islām Rashīd al-Dīn ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir, who captured his days with the composition of a *sīra* in which he eloquently constructed chapters on his good qualities [*suwaru maḥāsini-hi*], in this way and that way, and he recorded [*arrakha*] its happenings which are drawn up on the pages of his excellent actions [*ṣaḥāʾifu ḥasanāti-hi*], and he extended and made [these accounts] agreeable, he uttered the most delightful of orations, mentioned the totality of his times day by day, clarified his virtues [*ṣaraḥa bi-manāqibi-hi*] and indicated their uniqueness [*ibdāʿi-hā*]. However the situation demanded [of him] that he register

[60] *Ḥusn al-manāqib*, 55.

of these accounts [both] the lean and the fat,[61] and if [in doing so] he reiterated what he had uttered orally, [it is because] his sultan gave ear to who praises [*man aṭrā*],[62] and though he was truthful in this, he was not under oath.[63]

This is the lead-up to the crux of the introduction, the point at which Shāfiʿ wraps up the earlier discourse and creates a gap to be addressed in the last part of the section. This is even quite literally so, because one can see how he reuses several powerful terms that had been present in the earlier lines and in the title of the work: *ḥusn*, *manāqib*, and even *sirr*. Similar to the argumentative structure of his introduction in *Faḍl*, Shāfiʿ intensifies the semantic breadth as he edges closer towards the critical point in which his personal stake in the project will be explained. This happens in the last sentence translated here, in which he argues how and why Ibn ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir's sīra, while a praiseworthy effort in itself, was flawed. The gap he created in highlighting this flaw is in the following excerpt adequately filled by Shāfiʿ, who makes a different type of claim to fitness for this task than he did in Faḍl.

وكان – رحمه الله – قد تحدث معي في إختصارها فلم يتقف في حياته * ولم يقع تأدّبًا معه في إثبات نفيه ونفي إثباته * وقد إختصرتها رغبةً في الإيجاز الذي هو عين البلاغة * وعذوبة مياه الفصاحة المساغة * وذكرت منها الأهم المقدم لتلذّ مطالعها * وتروق مراجعتها * وبالله التوفيق

And he — may God have mercy on him — had talked to me about abridging it, but this did not take place during his lifetime, and it did not occur out of courteousness with him in acknowledgement of his [possible] rejection, and in rejection of his [possible] acknowledgement. I have abridged it desiring brevity, which is the goal of eloquence, and the sweetness of the freely flowing water of fluency, and I have mentioned of it the most important parts, giving precedence to the gratification of its perusal and making clear[64] its examining. I trust in God.[65]

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[61] Meaning that he would not distinguish between good and bad practice. Seef: https://www.almaany.com/ar/dict/ar-ar/الغث/ (paraphrased from al-Tawḥīdī, d. 414 / 1023)

[62] The manuscript has a *kasra* below the *ṭāʾ* here and al-Khuwayṭir thus read this as the substantive form *iṭrā[ʾ]*, reading further also من as *min* and not *man*. I instead read this as the verbal form *aṭrā* ("to praise"), which makes a lot more sense in the context. If we do take the *kasra* into account, we can read it as the passive verbal form *uṭira* (which would then need to be followed by *aw* ("or") and not *wa-* ("and")), and the phrase would mean something along the lines of "his sultan listened to who had been bent." This seems to make metaphorical sense in English, but I have not found lexicographical attestation for such a use in Arabic.

[63] *Ḥusn al-manāqib*, 55-56. Slight emendations on the basis of Arabe 1707, 4r.

[64] This verb is related to the clearing of drink "without pressing it". The verb choice is thus intimately related to the earlier noted metaphor of fluency as freely flowing water. Lane, *An Arabic-English Lexicon,* 1191.

[65] *Ḥusn al-manāqib*, 56-57.

Shāfiʿ's claim to authority is once more related to intimate connection, but this time not to the sultan whom he does not claim to have served, but to his uncle who suggested that his nephew abridge his work. The lines about him holding off to do so out of courtesy are quite suggestive for the family relations between the authors, especially considering the fact that the colophon notes that the work was only finished in 716 / 1316, when both Ibn ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir and his son Fatḥ al-Dīn were already long dead. Most importantly, our author also tells us how he went about abridging the *sīra.* The fact that his statement to have done so "desiring brevity" is of course a major recurring topos of Arabic introductions in general, but that does not mean it is a meaningless phrase.[66] Rather, by using this topos embedded in his signature rhetorical play with metaphors and rhyme, he is once more able to draw attention to the essence of his project: the literary reworking of a well-known work in the specific form of a *mukhtaṣar*.

4.3 Sedimentations and innovations

A close reading of the surviving introductions to these works thus yields a wealth of information about how our authors conceptualised the writing of *sīra*. In the following chapters I will argue that these discourses should not be seen as self-contained rhetorical exercises but were in fact translated to a significant degree in the remainder of the textual constructions. Furthermore, similar ideas may also be found in the texts for which no introductions have survived. It is however obvious that to compose such an introduction made use of common aspects, tropes of introductory discourse so to speak, but that does not mean that they had only limited direct meaning. Rather, such tropes were instrumentalised in the larger arguments formulated in the introductions, which embedded the discourse in valuable literary continuities. Our authors tried to make a cohesive argument for the value of their work and at the same time participated in discursive traditions on the goals and values of history. To paraphrase Ricoeur, this may be seen as an interplay between what he calls "innovation" and "sedimentation".[67] That is, considering that our authors were not the first to write about the value of

[66] Freimark, "Das Vorwort als literarische Form", 34.

[67] Ricoeur, *Temps et récit* 1:132-134. He returns to this argument a number of times, as it is an important component of his mimetic theory. For example, he interprets Hayden White's "types" of historiography as (rather too rigidly conceived) "paradigms", *Temps et récit,* 1:296. In my opinion Ricoeur is as such satisfyingly able to bridge the gap between traditional formalistic narrative analysis (of which White and Northrop Frye are late examples) and the stress on epistemological variation and construction seen in much postmodern textual analysis.

writing history, or even of a *sīra* specifically devoted to a contemporary ruler, they could build upon "sedimented" textual forms: received paradigms about historical value, common notions of history as exemplum and as a way of rendering the past accessible. But at the same time, as authors they "innovated", adding something of what Ricoeur calls "déviance calculée" to those paradigms, flexing their formal characteristics or, in this case, their recurrent discursive markers to say something subtly new about the importance of history writing and their own role in doing so. As a conclusion, I will briefly compare our authors' discussions to two similar prolegomena written by earlier authors who have generally been seen as sharing a discursive space with our authors.

The first of these introductions is found in Bahāʾ al-Dīn b. Shaddād's *sīra* of Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn, *al-Nawādir al-sulṭāniyya wa-l-maḥāsin al-Yūsufiyya.* As noted above (3.3.3.1.), this text has been suggested as a direct influence on Ibn ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir's *sīra* by P.M. Holt because of its similar tripartite structure, and one of the oldest manuscripts of this *sīra* can indeed be brought into the environment of two important courtly agents with whom Ibn ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir and Shāfiʿ must have had direct relations. Ibn Shaddād's introduction also suggests in some ways that Ibn ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir may have been inspired by it. The start of the introductory paragraph after the *taḥmīd* is immediately striking: Ibn Shaddād's also commences with the word *lammā.* As I noted above, this word is conventionally translated as "when" in modern Arabic, but in both these texts it is used as the start of a conditional sentence, more adequately translated as "since", or even "considering that". While Ibn ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir links this directly to the necessity of writing history and eventually ends up suggesting himself as ideal candidate, Ibn Shaddād's argument reads different: his *lammā* is immediately followed by *raʾaytu* or "I saw", thus immediately highlighting the very personal nature of the accounts to follow.[68] There is no intermediary relation between the necessity of writing and the author's own position in relation to that necessity as in Ibn ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir's discourse; rather, Ibn Shaddād himself creates the necessity, it is his having been an eyewitness to the events that engenders the necessity and which greatly bolsters the claim to superiority of his work. This has profound effects on the ways in which the *sīra*'s are written: whereas Ibn Shaddād's *Nawādir* is marked by a very strong personal authorial presence which may be argued to be the lens through which the reader learns about Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn, Ibn ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir is more distant, his rendering of Baybars taking central place while his authorial "lens" is more subtle and often less directly clear. Consequently, Ibn ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir's *sīra* includes comparatively few anecdotes about close personal interaction with the sultan, but

[68] Translated by D.S. Richards as "When I observed", which is surely not incorrect, but "Since I saw," or "As I witnessed" perhaps highlights the conditionality a bit more. *The Rare and Excellent History of Saladin, or* al-Nawādir al-sulṭāniyya wa-l-maḥāsin al-Yūsufiyya *by Bahāʾ al-Dīn Ibn Shaddād,* transl. D.S. Richards (Farnham-Burlington: Ashgate, 2002), 13.

instead refracts the author's personal presence in the writing itself, through the quality of *being* a writer. The crucial difference here of course lies in the fact that Ibn ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir presumably wrote this part of the text while Baybars was still alive, whereas Ibn Shaddād very likely only wrote his text several years after the death of Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn.[69] Although Ibn ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir clearly built on influences from an earlier, relatively widely circulated *sīra*, it is clear that he remoulded these classical arguments for the uses of historiography in his own introduction, and that he did so for good reason. He was not merely participating in this discursive tradition, but applying its stakes to his own project.

Another text which P.M. Holt presumed to be related to the early Mamluk corpus, is *al-Fatḥ al-Qussī fī l-fatḥ al-Qudsī,* written by the *kātib* ʿImād al-Dīn al-Iṣfahānī, who may have presented parts of the text to Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn himself and finished the text as a whole shortly after the sultan's death. As we have seen above (also 3.3.3.1.), at least one of its extant manuscript copies at one point belonged to Ibn ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir's grandson ʿAlāʾ al-Dīn b. ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir. Unlike his companion Bahāʾ al-Dīn b. Shaddād, ʿImād al-Dīn presents a very lengthy introduction replete with rhetorical stylistics, in that sense a fitting introduction to a work that has been received as one of the most densely written historical works in Arabic. Content-wise the work connects the importance of history writing as remembrance with the specific importance of the events he will describe — amounting to a praise of Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn's actions, which are claimed to amount to a new *hijra.* This major statement transits by way of an extended comparison of the virtues of pen and sword (in which the pen is always shown to be the most important) into a praise of the various types of literature (especially poetry) set to paper by the pen with the goal of facilitating historical memory. By stressing this last aspect, he is able to wrap up his argument by reverting to his own endeavour — also stated in short in the introduction's opening sentences, immediately after the work's *taḥmīd* — of uniting *tārīkh* and *adab* in this work, with the goal to please both those who are interested in historical events (*mustakhbirīn*) and those looking for literary eloquence (*udabāʾ*). As a final point, he bolsters his credentials by a claim to having been an eyewitness to all that he will recount.[70] Several aspects found in our authors' introductions are explicitly present here: the rhetorical inclination in which the text itself becomes a performance of the author's dexterity, the exceptionality of this specific ruler's deeds, and the stress on the personal value of having been an eyewitness. Implicitly present in the introductions of our authors is also the focus on the importance of the narrative's literary qualities, which are simply by way of them being used throughout the text

[69] *The Rare and Excellent History,* 6-7.
[70] *Al-fatḥ al-Qussī*, 2-12. Translated in: *Conquête de la Syrie et de la Palestine par Saladin (al-Fatḥ al-qussî fî al-fatḥ al-qudsî),* transl. H. Massé, ed. C. Pellat (Paris: Paul Geuthner, 1972)., 1-12.

suggested as most fitted to the historical-biographical project. While the specific elements of *hijra* and pen and sword do not appear in our authors' introductions, we will see below that they do figure prominently in the body texts of the *sīra*'s.

Establishing the exact relationship between Bahāʾ al-Dīn b. Shaddād's and ʿImād al-Dīn al-Iṣfahānī's earlier works and those of our authors remains a difficult task considering the fact that neither of the two later authors explicitly acknowledge their debt to any predecessors. Even the evidence of manuscript circulation, while highly suggestive, does not allow us to conclude that our authors were directly inspired by these two earlier author-companions in the absence of explicit claims to that effect. Yet the many similarities in the conceptualisations used are obvious, and this shows how four authors engaged across time and space in ways both similar and idiosyncratic in literary communication with specific discursive traditions of historiographical texts. Idiosyncratic, for despite the overlap in terminology and concepts, these are always instrumentalised in particular literary contexts and in argumentative structures that differ quite strongly. These authors made ample use of the "sediments" of Islamic texts to construct innovative and "new" texts, or to quote Ricoeur: "les paradigmes constituent seulement la grammaire qui règle la composition d'oeuvres nouvelles – nouvelles avant de devenir typiques".[71] It is this evaluation of "newness" in what is still too often seen as "typicality" which is necessary if we want to adequately evaluate the discursive web our authors constructed. We need to look for the meanings, sometimes seemingly uninspired, sometimes ambiguous or opaque, which our authors tried to convey by using these clichés and tropes in specific contexts.

Conclusion

We have seen that a close reading of the titles and introductions already yields a lot of information concerning our authors' approaches and goals to writing *sīra*. The three-pronged argument noted at the outset and developed in 4.2. is essential here, for it is this interweaving of the triple exemplarity of historiography in general, of the sultan in particular, and of his author-companion especially which will be shown in the following parts to have governed the selection and discussion of other material. *Sīra* is not just an innocent appellation for a "biography" in this sense, but is the crucial instrumental node around which that approach to writing history is constructed, as the position of

[71] Ricoeur, *Temps et récit,* 1:134.

the term in the majority of the titles also suggests. In the following two chapters I will look into how these approaches may be seen at work within the body texts themselves.

Chapter 5
Sīra as historical biography: narrative structures and historical topics

> *Here is the past and all its inhabitants miraculously sealed as in a magic tank; all we have to do is to look and to listen and to listen and to look and soon the little figures – for they are rather under life size – will begin to move and to speak, and as they move we shall arrange them in all sorts of patterns of which they were ignorant, for they thought when they were alive that they could go where they liked; and as they speak we shall read into their sayings all kinds of meanings which never struck them, for they believed when they were alive that they said straight off whatever came into their heads. But once you are in a biography all is different.*[1]

Virginia Woolf was rather critical of the great amount of biographical writing being produced in late nineteenth and early twentieth century England. Not only did she write two satirical novels in which she turned the practice on its head (*Orlando,* a time-, genre- and genderbending biography of a Renaissance poet, and *Flush,* a biography of the English poet Elizabeth Barrett Browning's cocker spaniel; both books subtitled "A Biography"), she also expressed her ambiguous attitude towards the writing of biography in several essays. Her creative questioning of the tenets of biography as a truthful and insightful rendering of a person's life and deeds is also expressed by the

[1] V. Woolf, "'I Am Christina Rossetti'", in *The Common Reader, Second Series* (Adelaide: The University of Adelaide Library, 2015) in http://ebooks.adelaide.edu.au/w/woolf/virginia/w91c2/chapter20.html

above-quoted excerpt from her 1930 essay "'I Am Christina Rossetti'", in which she argued against the contemporary habit of reading too much into poets' biographies when evaluating their poetry, stating somewhat further on in the piece that:

> It is poetry that matters. The only question of any interest is whether that poetry is good or bad.[2]

As such she effectively foreshadowed debates that would rage in 1960s criticism in the wake of Roland Barthes' important essay "The Death of the Author" in which he criticised the overreliance on authorial subjectivities in informing the understanding of texts, and argued for a text's multiple meanings through various readers' engagements with it in addition to that of the author.[3]

Virginia Woolf's and our authors' times were obviously fundamentally different, and so is her perspective on writing biography from the theoretical perspectives of Roland Barthes, or indeed of those literary theoreticians I have been engaging with more fundamentally. Yet Woolf's beautifully written prose does highlight a central problematic of this dissertation: *sīra* as biography is a reconstruction of the actions and deeds of a specific person, but it is essentially an author's *interpretation* of that past, his (or in Woolf's case, her) selection of actions and deeds, some of which may be of tenuous historicity, and all are meaningful foremost within the context of the textual whole and perhaps much less so within the actual life lived. We have seen how both Ibn ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir and Shāfiʿ defined *sīra* in part as a historical undertaking preoccupied with time, the rendering of the past, and especially the preservation of memory. Our authors are hardly original in this regard, for these were more or less the traditional stakes of pre-modern historical conceptualisation. But as we have seen, both our authors related these historical goals not only to the sultan's life and glory but also to their own contributions in the sultan's *dawla*. In doing so, it seems that they distinguished their works from the more general category of history, or *tārīkh,* by specifically referring to their works as *sīra*, i.e. as works that take the life and especially the reign of a sultan, and not the time during which he ruled, as primary point of reference. We have explored how they conteptualised history and the position of their own works in relation to it in their choice of titles and in their introductions, but now the question remains how they practically translated historical experience in the body of their texts.

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[2] Idem.

[3] An overview of these debates lies entirely out of the scope of this dissertation, but see for one classic discussion: S. Burke, *The Death and Return of the Author: Criticism and Subjectivity in Barthes, Foucault and Derrida* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1992).

In the following sections, I will focus on the ways in which our texts engaged with the past and, to paraphrase Ricoeur, reconfigured the cognitive remnants of lived experience into a specific type of narrative history. The idea that there was an active act of configuration behind the composition of these texts is discussed in a first section, in which I discuss the problem of the texts' cohesiveness, considering how some scholars have argued that some of these texts were little more than compilations. This is an important discussion, which I will furthermore return to in 6.2. to explore some of its practicalities more deeply. In a second section I will delineate the grand narrative constructions found in these texts as one of the primary ways in which our authors formally reconfigured the past. More generally, it will be argued that the introductory discourses of our authors were not merely rhetorical exercises, but significant statements of purpose that resonated in cohesive ways with the rest of the books' textual constructions. And lastly, in a third section I will turn to questions of ideal rule and historicisation, exploring the ways in which our authors moved across chronology to construct renderings of the past that were meaningful in their own times.

5.1 On cohesiveness and compilation

The textual cohesiveness I will be arguing for is partly a response to the idea that the *sīra*'s were compiled texts consisting of information written at various points throughout our authors' years of service to the sultan. In such a view it is thought that these texts functioned as a sort of running laudatory annals which were wrapped up after the sultan's death and offered as finished books to (one of) his successor(s). That compilation was an important part of our authors' undertaking is indeed not only evident from the inclusion of much quoted material (to which I will return in more detail below in. 6.1.), but also when Shāfiʿ refers to himself as "*jāmiʿ hādhihi l-sīra*", that is, "the one who *compiled* this *sīra*" when introducing a text to be quoted.[4] Furthermore, those manuscripts of our texts which preserve their ending sections — *al-Rawḍ al-zāhir, Tashrīf al-ayyām, Ḥusn al-Manāqib,* and *al-Faḍl al-maʾthūr* — all provide information about the sultan's death, so they can not have been offered in this form to the sultan whose life they depict. Only *al-Alṭāf al-khafiyya* must have been finished before the death of the sultan it depicts, as Ibn ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir himself died before al-Ashraf Khalīl. This of course

[4] *Faḍl,* 128, 143, 156; Arabe 1705, 27r, 48r, 67r, 96r. The texts quoted are both prose and poetry. Ibn ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir only does so once, in *Rawḍ,* 243: "*fa-naẓẓama l-qāḍī Muḥyī l-Dīn jāmiʿ al-sīra*".

raises all kinds of problems concerning patronage which I will return to in Part Three, but at the moment I will only be considering how this influences their general textual construction. I will try to elucidate the myriad ways by which all kinds of previously written texts were (re)written, compiled and perhaps most importantly *re-signified* into cohesive books that tried to communicate a central idea.[5] To do so, I will focus on the texts' general constructions on a formal and narrative level, showing how our authors consciously integrated material in a *sīra* with a comprehensive argument and compelling image of a sultan's life and reign. It will be shown that for a number of our texts this meant that annalistic chronology became of secondary importance. The specific workings of compiled material in that context will be discussed in Chapter 6.

One way to assess textual cohesiviveness is by looking at a text's use of subdivisions. Arabic texts of this period routinely subdivided their texts with subtitles, which served as "important reading tools" according to Maaike van Berkel, as they were meant to help readers to navigate the text and get a quick idea of the contents within.[6] Indeed, some texts in the period even contained tables of contents in which the various chapters were often designated as *abwāb* (singular *bāb,* "door"), but also by way of various other terms. No such tables of contents have survived for the *sīra*'s, but our authors did use various ways of subdividing their text. All the texts in our corpus formally distinguished the contents by way of headings that were written in bolder and larger, sometimes even textually separated and differently coloured script. By far the most common term to introduce such a section was *dhikr*, that is "mentioning", or even simply "report" or "account", which is followed by a specification of the subject matter to follow. Although this term was very commonly used in historiographical and other contexts, one may still see an important component of the historical conception of time in it: *dhikr* has a number of important associations in Islamic religious discourse, "remembrance" being one of the most important pillars of Qurʾānic discourse.[7] As we have seen in 4.2., it was also an important signifier in our authors' conceptualisations of historiography. In the light of the preserved introductory discourses, our authors' repeated use of this term may be seen not only as common practice to divide texts into manageable parts, but also as an indication of something *worth remembering*, something that needs to be saved from the abyss of time by the historian's able pen.

[5] See for a discussion of problems of compilation and "coherent order" in medieval Latin letter collections and the importance of trying to understand the logic of the compilation as it has come down to us, W. Verbaal, "Voicing your Voice: the Fiction of a Life: Early Twelfth-Century Letter Collections and the Case of Bernard of Clairvaux", *Interfaces* 4 (2017), 103-124.

[6] M. van Berkel, "Opening Up a World of Knowledge: Mamluk Encyclopaedias and Their Readers", in *Encyclopaedism form Antiquity to the Renaissance,* eds. J. König & G. Woolf (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 368-370.

[7] A. Broderson, "Remembrance", in *EQ* vol. 4:419-424.

Studying these subdivisions thus already goes some way into elucidating the cohesiveness of the textual construction, and I will refer to these at some points below, but often there is more at play, with grand narrative constructions operating across several such section headings. In the following I will deal predominantly with these grand constructions as they appear in a number of our texts. Additionally, I will highlight the formal subdivisions, as well as the ways in which these at some points closely interacted with the greater constructions.

5.2 Narrative construction

5.2.1 al-Rawḍ al-zāhir

As the most studied text in our corpus, the textual construction of *al-Rawḍ al-zāhir* has received some attention before. Most scholars have more or less followed P.M. Holt's evaluation while focusing on other aspects. For the present purposes of the text's general narrative construction, Holt's most important insight was that *al-Rawḍ* consists of a tripartite structure, inspired by Bahāʾ l-Dīn b. Shaddād's (1145 –1234) earlier *sīra* of Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn, *al-Nawādir al-sulṭānīya wa'l-maḥāsin al-yūsufīya.* The shared three-part construction consists of a first part — the introduction is not counted as part of this construction — which deals with the sultan's deeds before he ascended the throne; a second is an enumeration of various virtues in respectively eight (Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn) and seventeen (Baybars) subsections; and a third, constituting by far the bulk of the text, deals extensively with the events of the sultanate in a dominantly annalistic framework, although Ibn Shaddād's *sīra* races through the sultan's first years and only becomes more detailed from the point when Ibn Shaddād was a companion of the ruler onwards, whereas Ibn ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir's account is more chronologically balanced.

Considering the fact that the pre-sultanate chapter in Ibn Shaddād's *sīra* is much shorter than Ibn ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir's, Holt remarks that Ibn ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir's copying of this construction was a "clumsy interpolation which breaks the flow of the narrative".[8] Holt presents this criticism purely on the basis of his own reading, which is highly problematic because there is no evidence whatsoever that contemporary readers found this construction "clumsy" as well. Considering the nature of *sīra* writing and literary offerings in this and later periods, *al-Rawḍ* is actually remarkably linear in its

[8] Holt, "The Virtuous Ruler", 28. See also, Holt, "The Sultan as Ideal Ruler", 123, 129.

construction: it mostly deals with events in chronological fashion and does not digress much between various events of the sultan's life, unlike for example Shāfiʿ or a number of later writers of *sīra*'s. It is also notable that Shāfiʿ's abridgement of this text, *Ḥusn al-manāqib,* does not change this structure at all, although he does pick and choose those accounts he deemed relevant for his own presentation and digresses towards more recent events a number of times.

Despite his criticism of the text's "clumsy" construction, Holt was aware of the "critical importance" of the first part:[9] by far the majority of his discussion of the *sīra* deals with this part in conjunction with the virtue chapters, because it is in the first part that the important events of Baybars' two regicides, his exile in Syria and the Battle of ʿAyn Jālūt are described. Unlike Bahāʾ l-Dīn b. Shaddād, for whom only Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn's later achievements really counted in his depiction of an ideal ruler, Ibn ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir considered Baybars' pre-sultanate years as crucial for his narrative. Holt implies that this is the case because of the need to legitimise or at least narratively whitewash Baybars' origins and usurpation, but the choice also suggests that a narrative logic was applied to make sense of these years. One question Ibn ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir had to deal with, for example, is why Baybars did not take power immediately after killing Tūran Shāh instead of rambling about in Egypt and Syria for another ten years before actually ascending the throne. If Baybars was indeed the predestined successor to al-Ṣāliḥ Ayyūb, why did he not take power immediately, sparing Egypt and Syria the unstable intervening decade? I believe Ibn ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir found a way to positively explain these questions by employing a narrative idea of heroic development.

To put it schematically, Baybars moves from a position of stability and prosperity under al-Ṣāliḥ Ayyūb, whose reign is described in terms of ideal rule, to great instability and danger under his successors Tūrān Shāh and al-Muʿizz Aybak. While the first sultan is killed by Baybars and his companions, resulting in a short return to political stability, the second sultan quickly starts to conspire against Baybars and eventually has his companion Fāris al-Dīn Aqṭāy killed, whereupon Baybars and a number of other *mamlūks* flee to Syria. From there, our hero has to work through a series of trials in local politics, leads failed attacks against the Egyptian forces of al-Muʿizz Aybak[10] and even has to weather the forces of nature in one episode.[11] When the Mongols appear as a great exogenous enemy, Baybars unites his forces with the Egyptian ones under al-

[9] Holt, "Three Biographies", 26.
[10] The failure of which Baybars attributes himself to impure intentions among his followers. *Rawḍ*, 59-60.
[11] This episode in which Baybars and three companions wander through the desert, nearly dying of hunger and thirst but miraculously being saved by a rain sent by God, was later imaginatively elaborated upon by Ibn al-Dawādārī, who describes the company coming upon a "green city" in the desert. *Kanz al-durar* 8:26-8. It is also related in very "literary" terms in the first chapter of ʿIzz al-Dīn b. Shaddād's virtue appendix, which deals with "wonderful events" (*ittifāqāt ittafaqat la-hu ʿajibatin*), *Tārīkh al-Malik al-Ẓāhir,* 267.

Muẓaffar Quṭuz, who has by now taken over the reins of the Egyptian sultanate. With these united forces Baybars is able to heroically defeat the enemy at the battle of ʿAyn Jālūt, where he is presented as the foremost hero who even leads further attacks on fleeing bands of Mongols. During the return journey of the Mamluk troops to Egypt, Quṭuz, who is framed as developing unjust and incompetent tendencies, is murdered and Baybars, who is now finally able to claim his rightful place as sultan, as the legitimate heir of al-Ṣāliḥ Ayyūb.

While the chronology of historical events is respected here, Ibn ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir does not seem to have aimed in the first place at presenting a strictly linear presentation of Baybars's life. Rather, he is using the facts as a basis to spin a captivating story of growth and heroism about Baybars' early years. He conceptualised the ten years between al-Ṣāliḥ Ayyūb's death and Baybars' own ascension to the throne as a series of trials, a political growth, in which he had to wait for the right moment to claim the throne. In fact, as we have seen above, early on in this section he praises the sultan as being eager to learn from al-Ṣāliḥ Ayyūb's example and it is said that "his soul directed itself to the ascent of the way-stations of kingship (*manāzil al-mulk*)", thus already signaling the idea that the ascension of the sultanate is quite literally a journey of growth and learning.[12]

On a more abstract level, in presenting this tale of growth and rightful ascendancy, Ibn ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir can be said to have used a mode of narration found throughout many of the world's cultures' mythologies and narratives. This first part agrees with the mythical stages in the "monomyth" expounded upon by Joseph Campbell, as well as the structuralist plot sections of the folk tale distinguished by Vladimir Propp,[13] and with Northrop Frye's "archetype" of "the journey".[14] Although the theoretisation of these grand constructions has been mostly based on myths and stories from Western Christian culture, they are not at all alien to Arabic-Islamic literature. The structure can for example be found in early Islamic panegyrics in the guise of the theme of the *raḥīl,* the wandering poet faced with many hardships and trials in the desert in the second

[12] *Rawḍ*, 47

[13] J. Campbell, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1968); V. Propp, *Morphology of the Folktale,* transl. L. Scott (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 1968). Campbell's theories have not aged well and are only rarely used by historians, although they have remained highly popular, and have recently been dispersed even broader by the conservative psychologist Jordan Peterson (although the latter only acknowledges the influence of Carl Gustav Jung's archetypes). Despite this somewhat disturbing conservative recuperation, I believe that on a very basic level, Campbell's (and Propp's) theory that several plot points are common to many of the world's myths and heroic stories can hardly be denied. For a recent (but not very theoretically inclined) example in which Campbell's plot sections are referred to as building blocks in narrative construction of rulership, see: S. Doran, "Elizabeth I, Joseph Campbell and the Nine Worthies", in *Die Inszenierung der heroischen Monarchie: Frühneuzeitliches Königtum zwischen ritterlichem Erbe und militärischer Herausforderung,* ed. M. Wrede (Munich: De Gruyter, 2014), 83-97.

[14] N. Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism: Four Essays* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1957).

part of the traditional tripartite *qaṣīda*.[15] Furthermore, there is a striking parallel to this storyline in the prophetic *hijra,* where Muḥammad also has to leave Mecca due to external pressure and then garners strength in Medina before eventually returning gloriously to his hometown.[16] Similarly, Baybars too is forced to abandon his position of sublime "stasis" and has to flee to distant lands before he can regain his rightful status. This "crossing of the threshold" is a crucial part in heroic narratives, the journey to a place where the hero has to garner strength to regain his predestined position. While in many traditional stories upon which Propp and Campbell based their ideas, the retrieval of stasis, or the achievement of desire is the endpoint of the journey, here it sets the stage for the later heroic acts of Baybars' sultanship, to be narrated in the third part of the text. As it were, the first part functions as a prologue, conceptualising Baybars's fitness for the sultanate in an almost mythological mode.

Of course, Ibn ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir did not invent Baybars' pre-sultanate experiences to fit his narrative. Seeing the potential of these early events, however, he remoulded them in a heroic framework, emplotting his version of the events in existing paradigms that strengthened the narrative and performative qualities of the text. To make his point of Baybars being an exceptionally heroic ruler, it makes perfect sense to have recourse to the narrative form traditionally favoured by heroic stories to set the stage for the account of Baybars's glorious sultanate. Moreover, by mixing well known events with a well known story arch, and further sprinkling it with references to figures, events and concepts derived from the shared cultural background of author and audience, he was no doubt able to pull along his audience in a richly poetic universe that was able to satisfyingly explain (at least on a narrative level) the remarkable ascendancy of Baybars.

Remarkably, our author was not the only to make this evaluation of Baybars' early years as being suffused with wondrous events. The surviving part of ʿIzz al-Dīn b. Shaddād's *sīra* does not cover these early years, but its appendix in which the author deals with Baybars' virtues does rather explicitly frame the importance of these events. Not only does he categorise several of the events in this period as *ʿajīb(a),* or "marvelous", he also writes about Baybars' departure from and eventual return to Egypt:

> وخرج من مصر لما قتل الأمير فارس الدين أقطاي الجامدار فارًّا بنفسه * في شرذمةٍ من أبناء جنسه * فقضى الله في عوده إليها مالكًا أُسوة نبيّه حيث أُخرج من مكة دار أُسرته * فأعاده إليها وقد أناله بملكها فوق ما تمنّاه في حال عسرته *

[15] Stefan Sperl, "Islamic Kingship and Arabic Panegyric Poetry in the Early 9th Century", in *Journal of Arabic Literature* 8 (1977), 25, 28.
[16] On the narrative pacing of the prophetic *sīra,* though not explicitly linked to any narrative theories, see: U. Rubin, *The Eye of the Beholder.*

> He left Egypt when the amir Fāris al-Dīn Aqṭāy al-Jamdār was killed, fleeing himself with a small group of the children of his race. Then God provided the example of His Prophet (*uswat nabiyyi-hi*) who left Mecca, the land of his family, for his return to [Egypt] to possess it, and He returned [Baybars] to [Egypt] and he let him obtain its kingship, beyond what he desired in his condition of destitution.[17]

The section in which this statement appears is very different in tone to the rest of ʿIzz al-Dīn's work, considering its extensive use of *sajʿ* and relinquishment of chronology, but it is significant that here he evaluates these events in a register and in conceptual terms that are highly similar to Ibn ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir's. Either Ibn ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir's text had been read by ʿIzz al-Dīn at the point of writing or both were voicing a narrative evaluation of these early years that had become common at the time.

While this first section only takes up a relatively small part of the entire text, it is important for its further development. As noted by Holt, the account of Baybars' ascension is immediately followed by a discussion of various virtues, which may have been directly inspired by Bahāʾ al-Dīn b. Shaddād, although it is a common enough feature of medieval discourses on rulership in general.[18] The interpolation may seem random to a modern reader, but if we consider the book's construction more deeply it makes a lot of sense: if the first part deals with heroic development and the eventual attainment of the protagonist's rightful position, the second part on virtues presents a sampling of specific material on how the sultan's ascension initiated a time of justice and prosperity, much of which later reappears in the annalistic third section of the book. Although this may give the impression of a neatly divided text, there is in fact some overlapping evolution: note for example that the first meticulously dated event of the text is part of the sultan's ascension ceremony which concludes the first part as the climax of the sultan's journey, namely the point at which he "rode out with the emblems (*shaʿāʾir*) of the sultanate".[19] This particular event is then followed by the virtue chapters, and only after those sections transition again into the annalistic narrative, our

[17] Ibn Shaddād, *Tārīkh al-Malik al-Ẓāhir,* 268.

[18] Although the placement of such sections seems to have been rather flexible. As noted, the contemporary *Tārīkh al-Malik al-Ẓāhir* of ʿIzz al-Dīn b. Shaddād includes a fairly long virtues (*manāqib*) section at the end of the text (267-321). Ibn ʿAqīl similarly ended his literary offering to al-Ẓāhir Barqūq, *al-Durr al-naḍīḍ fī manāqib al-Malik al-Ẓāhir Abī Saʿīd,* with such a section. Staatsbibliothek Berlin, MS Wetzstein I 38r-44v. From my cursory reading, it seems that Ibn ʿArabshāh (or according to Tarek Sabraa, an author purporting to be Ibn ʿArabshāh -- personal communication) interwove ideal virtues in the form of a mirror for princes with examples of how al-Ẓāhir Jaqmaq personified these particular virtues in *al-Taʾlīf al-ṭāhir fī shiyam al-Malik al-Ẓāhir,* British Library MS Or. 3026. As a comparative European example, Jean sire de Joinville also starts of his *Vie de Saint Louis* with a section on virtues, §§ 19-68.

[19] *Rawḍ*, 71.

author picks up the chronological thread, at which point dating becomes very prominent for the remainder of the text.[20] At that point the text becomes a much more traditional historiographical text and the manuscripts even clearly highlight the changes in years.[21] This is not to say that the third part of the manuscript is entirely devoid of heroic elements and explicit associations of the sultan to the great examples of preceding rulers, but these are much more firmly embedded in the annalistic framework. Within that framework our author's writing also becomes slightly more associative, with regular digressions detailing historical information of various places and regular insertions of documents and poems (I will return to these practices in 6.2).

The virtues section is not an interpollation then, but a bridge between the seemingly timeless character of the first part and the historically specific annalistic section by way of an overview of the sultan's good qualities taken from various moments in his life. By conveniently grouping these good deeds in the virtues section, and chronologically embedding them in the following annalistic section, the reader may be informed about "the benefactions and evils each of [the kings] committed in words and deeds" as well as "about how the days elapsed and turned about, by which [causes events] were brought about or averted", as Ibn ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir claims in his introductory statement on the goals of *sīra*.

5.2.2 Ḥusn al-manāqib

Considering the fact that Shāfiʿ's *sīra* of Baybars is explicitly announced to be an abridgment of his uncle's *sīra,* the major question about its textual construction is in how far it adheres to the structure set out by *al-Rawḍ al-zāhir*. We have already seen that Shāfiʿ did not just abridge the text, but that he added an entirely new introduction in which he shifted the stakes of the project considerably to make it more explicitly a text that celebrates the particular practice of abridging. This translates into a text that is at times rather truncated, in which our author often glosses over historical information but leaves intact the majority of quoted documents and poems. At one point, our author even skips five years without explanation.[22] Similar to his evaluation of *al-Rawḍ al-zāhir*, Holt claims that *Ḥusn al-manāqib* is despite is historical importance "inartistically

[20] A perusal of the first pages of the chronological part yields dates on: *Rawḍ,* 92, 99, 101, 111, 114, 121, 123, etc.
[21] The Istanbul manuscript highlights the year changes with prominent headings, although it only picks up doing so from the year 663/1264: *MS Fatih 4366*, 62v, 75v, 98r, 123r, 136v, 143r, 153r, 160r, 166v, 172v, 182v, 192v. The British Library manuscript is cut off during this particular year, which is prominently highlighted on 95r. There is also one specifically and prominently dated event on 73r.
[22] *Ḥusn,* 312 (start of the year 672, while the previous page dealt with events in the year 667 (*Ḥusn,* 291-311)). It is of course entirely possible that this is a copyist's mistake.

constructed" because it sometimes contains two conflicting versions of the same events.[23]

What is in any case true is that *Ḥusn al-manāqib* is markedly more critical towards its sultanic subject than *al-Rawḍ al-zāhir.* Shāfiʿ's abridgement often explicitly corrects the claims of its source text or adds a perspective that puts the events in another light. For the heroic narrative found in *Rawḍ*'s first section, this has rather important consequences, for Shāfiʿ regularly undermines his uncle's claims, by for example stating that Baybars was not initially acquired by al-Ṣāliḥ Ayyūb but had served another amir first, and perhaps most prominently, by giving a rather different, less auspicious version of the episode of Baybars' regicide of his predecessor Quṭuz. In this version Baybars' ascension of the sultanate is presented more as an agreement among the prominent amirs, rather than as divinely ordained. Yet in general, the original text's tripartite division is kept intact: Shāfiʿ similarly only starts dating events more thoroughly after the sultan's ascension,[24] and he does not fully excise the virtue chapters, although he does pick and choose from them and gives alternate versions for a number of its claims.

Those criticisms and interventions in the narrative are doubtlessly the most important element of the abridgement's textual structure. This results as it were in a parallel text which regularly breaks through the chronological narrative. Although some of these asides consist of little more than a brief comment, a few are rather more substantial digressions. There are even some flash-forwards in which our author himself becomes an important agent in the narrative, especially later on in the text. One subtantial digression for example follows a discussion of Baybars' dealings with Tripoli, when our author skips forward to Qalāwūn's dealings with the same city. In those later events Shāfiʿ himself is a crucial part of the narrative's development by being the one who sets straight a Frankish ambassador.[25] A similar episode is found only slightly later in the text, in a digression from Baybars' dealings with Acre, when Shāfiʿ details his crucial role in finding a loophole in the peace treaty with the last remaining Frankish stronghold during the final period of Qalāwūn's reign.[26] Interestingly, variant versions of both these episodes also appear in Shāfiʿ's *sīra* of Qalāwūn. These interventions, be they small or extensive, are regularly marked in rather more pronounced orthography

[23] Holt, "Some observations", 124.
[24] *Ḥusn,* 70 (the riding with the emblems). The next dated event is on p. 79 (the caliph's investiture). The manuscript of the text does at some points highlight the changes in years: Arabe 1707 *(Ḥusn al-manāqib),* 38r, 79r, 144r, all dealing with post-ascension events. On 126r a *dhikr* is also specified as taking place in a specific year. Furthermore, many events are introduced with a visually pronounced *wa-fī-hā,* i.e. "and in this [year]."
[25] *Ḥusn,* 271-277. Part of this episode has been translated by P.M. Holt in *Early Mamluk Diplomacy,* 58-60.
[26] *Ḥusn,* 284-286. There is also a much earlier digression in which our author details Acre's later conquest, including a rendering of his rather lengthy felicitation poem for that occasion, which also closes off *Faḍl. Ḥusn,* 120-127.

by the verbal form "*aqūl*" ("I say").[27] They were clearly meant to be easily visible, so that even a quick glance would get the idea across that this was not merely an abridgement, but also a sort of running commentary.

The result of this parallel construction results in a complex text that may have seemed "inartistic" to Holt but which is in fact highly effective in performing the textual pre-eminence of the abridger and associating him closely not only with the important original author and his subject, but also with a claim to historical truth, exemplified through this "corrected" narrative. In that sense, it resonates in interesting ways with the other *sīra*'s written by our author, as we shall see.

5.2.3 al-Faḍl al-maʾthūr

According to P.M. Holt *al-Faḍl al-maʾthūr* was "largely composed as an encomium of Qalāwūn in his lifetime," but "not finally put together until after the murder of his son and successor, al-Ashraf Khalil".[28] Although Holt has discussed several of its anecdotes and documents, the most thorough analysis of its general communicative idea is Tahar Mansouri's. He divides *Faḍl* into three main parts, consisting of "le contexte de la prise du pouvoir par Qalāwūn", "la pacification du sultanat," and lastly "la gestion quotidienne du pouvoir", which according to him is "la partie la plus importante de l'ouvrage". The textual construction is in fact rather more complex than this, and especially Mansouri's third section is a somewhat too eclectic container for all kinds of material which deserves to be singled out more thoroughly, but I will refer back to his classification at some points below as it is helpful to break the text into manageable chunks.[29]

Al-Faḍl al-maʾthūr is similar to *al-Rawḍ al-zāhir* in that its first section is also built around a structure that can be linked to the "monomyth" followed by a more or less chronological description of what happened after the sultan's ascension of the throne (Mansouri's "pacification du sultanat"), as described above. Qalāwūn is portrayed as being personally selected by al-Ṣāliḥ Ayyūb to join his elite corps because of his excellent physique — other historians tell us that he was in fact bought by another amir, but they concur with the story about his exceptionality, which gave him the nickname

[27] Arabe 1707 (*Ḥusn al-manāqib*), 32v, 34r, 78r, 78v, 84v, 85r, 96r, 112r, 135r, 138r, 139r, 143r. It should be noted that forms of the verb *qāla* (to say) are in general written in a distinctive eye-catching orthography by the manuscript's copiist. These personal interventions by the author are clearly discernible nonetheless.
[28] P.M. Holt, "The Presentation of Qalāwūn by Shāfi' ibn 'Alī", 143, 148; Holt, "A Chancery Clerk in Medieval Egypt", 673. Lewicka subscribes to Holt's interpretation, calling it a "compilation of biographical pieces". *Šāfiʿ Ibn ʿAlī's Biography of the Mamluk Sultan Qalāwūn,* 97.
[29] Mansouri, "Le portrait", §4.

"*al-alfī*" because a huge sum of 1000 (*alf*) dinars was paid for him. While it was important for Shāfiʿ to establish this relation with the sultan, he does not develop it in much detail, and we do not get any information about Qalāwūn's actions in the decade between al-Ṣāliḥ's death and the ascension of Quṭuz — interestingly, the episodes in which Tūrānshāh and Quṭuz are murdered are both not related, although the second is insinuated. Qalāwūn's importance as an advisor to Quṭuz is stressed and it is strongly implied that he was the one amir whom Quṭuz could not gainsay, but the narrative only really picks up when describing Baybars' reign. Shāfiʿ does not discuss Qalāwūn's relation to Baybars chronologically, but rather singles out a number of important examples of Qalāwūn's importance to Baybars' *dawla*. The most important of these is the marriage of Baybars' son Bereke to Qalāwūn's daughter, for which Ibn ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir (noted as "*khālī*", "my maternal uncle") composed the ceremonial *khuṭba* (introduced as a "*kitāb al-ṣadāqi*"), which is quoted in full.[30] After this relatively lengthy document, Shāfiʿ returns to detailing Qalāwūn's importance during Baybars' *dawla,* now by stressing his martial abilities and his advisory role in the management of political affairs, concluding that "all this was according to the view of our lord the sultan [Qalāwūn] who unfailingly advised [Baybars] (*mā khāba mustashīra-hu*)".[31] As such, we get an extended section of narrative "stasis", in which Qalāwūn is presented in a harmonious relation to the sultans he served, as acquiring the necessary traits of an ideal ruler by participating in the rule of his predecessors. It is probably precisely for that reason that all the troublesome reigns of sultans preceding Baybars are not dealt with in much detail, as this would put too much stress on Baybars' responsibility in bringing stability after his ascension. In Shāfiʿ's project of using these reigns to exemplarily present Qalāwūn's fitness for rule a bird's eye view of chronology with some particular zoomed in examples clearly works better.

The real challenge to this harmonious state is presented not in these earlier times, but with the ascension of al-Saʿīd Bereke to the throne after Baybars' death. The latter is barely introduced or Shāfiʿ starts detailing how news started arriving about Mongol plans to invade Syria again. The sultan decides to set out for Syria to prepare, but it is Qalāwūn who shows himself to be the real leader, "covering [Bereke] with the wing of his fatherhood". But, as Tahar Mansouri notes, Bereke is presented as "a misguided youngster" who is surrounded by bad advisors,[32] as is for example evident from this quote:

[30] *Faḍl,* 28. Another one of Qalāwūn's close associations with Baybars is his brokerage of the marriage between Baybars himself and the daughter of the Mongol amir Karmūn, which is related on p. 27.
[31] *Faḍl,* 36.
[32] Mansouri, "Le Portrait", §16.

وأما العدو فإنهم أحجموا * وفشلوا وما أقدموا * وخافوا وما حافوا * إلا أن الملك السعيد وافق من حوله من ذوى اللهو * وأرباب الزهو * فانعكف وما اعتكف * واستمطر سحاب المكرم الأكرم وقد وكف * وما كف في تناوله ساعدًا ولا كفّ * واحتخب عن الرأي وصوابه * والقول وجوابه *

And concerning the enemy, they recoiled, lost courage and were not bold, they were scared and not on the side of [the winning]. Yet al-Malik al-Saʿīd sanctioned people of amusement (*dhawā l-lahw*) and masters of vanity in his surroundings, and he withdrew and devoted himself zealously, invoking the most honourable clouds and they dripped. He did not renounce his unceasing eating which fattened him. He withdrew from judgement and reason and from speaking and answering.[33]

Such a portrayal in fact adheres to a classic narrative of rulerly incompetence: the indulging in poetry, music, food and drinking at a time of crisis, which is highly reminiscent of stories told about the Abbasid caliph al-Amīn (d. 198 / 813) and closer in time Tūrānshāh.[34] One anecdote tells of a drunken poet who offends Qalāwūn at the foot of the Citadel of Damascus by his improper behaviour. When Bereke waves away this incident, Qalāwūn and a number of emirs angrily leave his service. Things do not improve, however, and Bereke proves his unfitness at several points, which makes Shāfiʿ conclude that he engendered "*fitna*" and "*miḥna*" among the amirs, two very powerful terms to stress discord considering their associations with important periods of political turmoil in early Islamic history.[35] In these troubled times, Qalāwūn is presented as wanting the best for the sultanate, negotiating with Bereke, and at one point even with his mother to improve the situation,[36] but resistance from Baybars' old amirs results in more *fitna*. In the end Bereke finally abdicates in favour of his infant brother al-ʿĀdil Salāmish, but the amirs are then presented as showing a preference for Qalāwūn's personal ascension of the throne, which he reluctantly accepts.[37]

Where one would now expect the installation of the sultan's harmonious rule as in Ibn ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir's narrative, Shāfiʿ instead continues detailing the internal and external troubles of the sultanate: Bereke remains a nuisance until he dies shortly after Qalāwūn's ascension, the Mongols prepare new attacks, and slightly later the powerful amir Shams al-Dīn Sunqur al-Ashqar establishes a counter-sultanate in Damascus. Finally, after the description of the Battle of Homs, the work all but loses its

[33] *Faḍl,* 38.
[34] For the former, see T. El-Hibri, *Reinterpreting Islamic History,* 61-66; for Tūrānshāh, see the grotesque portrayal of him by al-Kutubī paraphrased in T. Herzog, "Romans populaires arabes", 99-100.
[35] *Faḍl,* 41, 43.
[36] The negotiation with Bereke's mother is an interesting episode in itself, in which Shāfiʿ also rhetorically plays with the meanings of "manliness", implying that Qalāwūn's having to negotiate with Bereke's mother was an aberration because of Bereke's weakness in dealing with the situation. *Faḍl,* 44-45.
[37] *Faḍl,* 51.

chronological focus, and becomes much more compilatory, starting with a text on the "good tidings" (*bushrā*) about the victory at Homs, which Shāfiʿ himself acknowledges to have been a stand-alone text both at the beginning and the end of the section.[38] The book then seems to pick up the chronological thread again for a few pages, although none of the accounts are explicitly dated. The remainder of the book is an assortment of various sections:

- An important cohesive section on the diplomatic exchange with the Mongol ruler Aḥmad Tegüder.[39]
- Three related "memoranda" (*tadhkira,* pl. *tadhākir*) written respectively by Ibn ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir, his son Fatḥ al-Dīn, and Shāfiʿ himself.[40]
- A short section on the sultan's dealings with Khiḍr, the youngest son of Baybars, including a letter which Shāfiʿ claims to have written.[41]
- A longer section on various dealings with the Frankish lordships of Acre, Marqab, Tripoli, including several (self-written) documents.[42]
- Three short sections on the co-sultanship and death of Qalāwūn's son al-Ṣāliḥ ʿAlāʾ al-Dīn, including a self-written elegy.[43]
- A section on the construction of the sultan's madrasa and *bīmaristān.*[44]
- A very short section on various virtues.[45]
- A relatively long and diverse but internally quite cohesive section on the preparations for the conquest of Acre during which Qalāwūn died and which was eventually achieved by his successor al-Ashraf Khalīl.[46]

What to make of this structure? It is clear that Shāfiʿ's narrative construction is less streamlined than Ibn ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir's in *Rawḍ,* and that its grand set-piece qualities found in the first section dissipate in the later parts. If there is any resolve of the breach of stasis, then it is only after the Battle of Homs, in what Mansouri has named "la gestion quotidienne du pouvoir", the variety of anecdotes and documents exemplifying in non-chronological fashion how the sultan ruled his domains. Unlike Baybars, whose growth was situated in the decade between al-Ṣāliḥ Ayyūb's rule and the start of his own,

[38] *Faḍl,* 77-85
[39] *Faḍl,* 92-118. See 6.2.1.1.
[40] *Faḍl,* 118-134. See 6.2.3.
[41] *Faḍl,* 134-140.
[42] *Faḍl,* 140-162.
[43] *Faḍl,* 162-166.
[44] *Faḍl,* 166-170.
[45] *Faḍl,* 170-173. Not announced as a virtues section as in *al-Rawḍ al-zāhir.*
[46] *Faḍl,* 173-183.

Qalāwūn's growth continues throughout the first years of his sultanate, which were in large part an endeavour of "pacification", as Mansouri calls it. Once that pacification is achieved, the desired harmoniousness is reached, but narratively presented by resorting to compilation. It is as such perhaps not surprising that the text never really picks up regular dating. Giving a meticulous overview of the events was not our author's primary concern here. The few dates given are quite significant, such as the death of the sultan's rival and predecessor al-Saʿīd Bereke or the exact date at which the army set out to confront the Mongols at the Battle of Homs, a part of the text that functions as a self-contained narrative.[47] But especially in the later section chronology becomes all but irrelevant. The attainment of an ideal rule stasis is in large part articulated through *inshāʾ* and *adab* discourses on power, especially through the various documents and poems written by Shāfiʿ and his colleagues. We may follow Holt's evaluation of *Faḍl* as a compiled text then, but we must add the important remark that Shāfiʿ consciously used that compilation to stress a point he found of utmost importance in presenting an image of the sultanate: the role of the *dīwān al-inshāʾ.*

In fact, as I have suggested in my analysis of the introduction to *Faḍl,* I believe it was Shāfiʿ's intention to construct a textual edifice of praise both to the sultan *and* to the practice of *inshāʾ* as fundamentally constitutive to his *dawla.* The comparatively high amount of compiled text already shows the crucial importance attached to text produced in service of (correspondence, other official documents) or in direct relation to (praise poems) the sultan.[48] It is also telling that of its first eleven manuscript pages, five are devoted almost entirely to the quoting of a *khuṭba* written by Shāfiʿ's uncle, thus highlighting this scribal importance already from the outset. I will return to discussing the importance of such documents below in 6.2.1.

The role of the *dīwān* is not only abstractly stressed by way of the compiled texts, but also in narrative form by way of various anecdotes detailing the workings of the *dīwān* as a major state agent. Furthermore, these anecdotes usually feature Shāfiʿ in an essential role, or as Holt calls him, "the man with the bright conclusive idea", because he will often provide a crucial insight to resolve a certain problem.[49] These instances usually involve a change in register as well, including quite a bit of direct speech, at some points even portraying Qalāwūn as speaking colloquial Arabic.[50] These episodes start quite early in the book during al-Saʿīd Bereke's reign, for example when our author

[47] *Faḍl*, 58, 71.
[48] For tabulated overviews of the types of quoted official material per text, see 6.2.1. *Faḍl* contains 21 quoted pieces spread over about 130 folios in MS Marsh 424. Compare *Rawḍ:* 20 pieces for about 250 folios (almost 100 pages in the British Library Manuscript, almost 200 in the Istanbul manuscript, the first part of which overlaps with the BL Manuscript); *Tashrīf*, 15 pieces for 376 folios (but only 7 lines per page). For a tabulated overview of poetry in this text and in the other *sīra*'s, see 6.2.2.
[49] Holt, "The Īlkhān Aḥmad's Embassies to Qalāwūn", 129.
[50] *Faḍl,* 52, 169.

refuses to write to the Ismāʿīlī's to help Bereke and then switches sides to Qalāwūn (to whom he addresses himself with the Persianate "*yā khawand*").[51] Qalāwūn's reign itself also starts with such an episode, when Shāfiʿ tells us how he was called upon to provide the sultan's regnal title and refuses to do so without the proper ceremonial.[52] Another early example involves the important *kuttāb* Fakhr al-Din b. Luqmān and Fatḥ al-Dīn being unsure about how to write a specific document, upon which our author provides the necessary perspective.[53] Several more such instances are spread throughout the text.[54]

Such instances are of course highly interesting for Shāfiʿ's self-presentation, especially in the contrastive light of what we are told by other sources about his early retirement (the lack of chronology is suggestive in this sense, one feels as if the author did not want his readers to situate these events either before or after his blindness), but they also contribute to the rather pervasive presence of the workings of the *dīwān* throughout the text. The regular though flexible occurrence of a common phrase throughout the text further underlines this: the verbal forms *rasama*, meaning "he prescribed", or *amara*, meaning "he ordered", referring to the ruler's decisions, used in direct association with the first person plural *fa-katabnā* or the first person singular *katabtu*, meaning respectively "so we wrote" or "so I wrote". Sometimes these phrases precede a full or paraphrased rendering of a resulting text,[55] but they are also regularly used as narrative padding, often but not only in the very same instances where our author talks extensively about his own involvement.[56] I have not come across similar phrases in Ibn ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir's work, and it only appears once in *Ḥusn al-manāqib* and twice in the *sīra* of al-Nāṣir Muḥammad, so it is a quite peculiar choice to use this phrase so often in *Faḍl*.[57] Yet it makes perfect sense in Shāfiʿ's general approach, as the participative and performative qualities of such a statement are more significant than they would seem at first sight. The process of political decision making is here effectively broadened to include not just the sultan as the maker of decisions, but also the *dīwān al-inshāʾ*, who have to translate the sultan's decision into an eloquently written prose letter, edict, or other appropriate document before it becomes effective. As such, *al-Faḍl al-maʾthūr* continually communicates the crucial importance of the *dīwān* to the sultan's project. It will become clear from my general analysis that this much is also true

[51] *Faḍl,* 49.
[52] *Faḍl,* 51.
[53] *Faḍl,* 61.
[54] *Faḍl,* 67, 71, 76, 83, 102, 146-148, 163, 172.
[55] As in *Faḍl,* 40, 46 (peculiar, because the phrase is broken up by quotation of the text), 56, 68 (excluding *rasama* or *amara* but with a clear statement that these were the sultan's words, "*kalām*"), 76, 85, 87, 137, 141.
[56] *Faḍl,* 42, 52, 55, 65, 89, 101-2 (narratively spread out, detailing the various stages of composition in the *dīwān* after the sultan's request), 172.
[57] *Ḥusn,* 322; *Arabe 1705*, 48r, 103v. The latter reference is quite different, but it communicates a similar idea.

of the other texts in this corpus, but *al-Faḍl al-maʾthūr* is by far the most explicit in positing this narrative predominance of the *dīwān*.

5.2.4 Tashrīf al-ayyām

Did Ibn ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir follow a similar narrative construction to portray Qalāwūn's rise to power as his nephew did or, indeed, as he himself did for Baybars? Due to its incomplete survival, it is difficult to assess the narrative construction of Ibn ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir's *sīra* of Qalāwūn, especially since so little is known about it and no later historians quote it. Hypothetically speaking, it is not unlikely that our author would have devoted some space to Qalāwūn's early life in the first volume, because the second part of the text only picks up in the middle of the year 680 / 1281, i.e. during the second year of Qalāwūn's sultanate. Considering the fact that the combined manuscript of this second and (presumably the majority of the) third volume consists of 376 folio's,[58] it is likely that even a volume of half that size would have contained ample space for such a textual construction, perhaps culminating in the Battle of Homs, of which he have no account by Ibn ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir.

[58] There is a gap of unknown length at the beginning of the third volume but considering that the third volume is already more voluminous than the second, my hypothesis is that only its first pages would be missing. *BnF Arabe 1704*, 148r.

The second volume of the text starts off chronographically and continues doing so throughout, with the majority of accounts being minutely dated,[59] although a number of reports are only identified as having taken place "in this year". The difference often amounts to the fact that some accounts are spread over a longer period, where specific episodes may be dated in more detail.[60] Other lapses in dating are more remarkable; one would for example have expected Ibn ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir to be more precise in dating the arrival of Indian envoys at court, but here his account is much more preoccupied with describing the route taken by the envoys to Cairo and the various gifts they had with them.[61] Despite these occasional lapses, in general the chronological focus is dominant, and *Tashrīf al-ayyām* is the only text in our main corpus to consistently highlight the changes in years, although as noted *al-Rawḍ* also does do so for most of Baybars' sultanate.[62] The lavishly executed manuscript of *Tashrīf al-ayyām* renders all but one of these year changes in a larger script than the regular text, thus making them easily retrievable for a reader.[63] However, the last year explicitly noted in *Tashrīf al-ayyām* is 686, well before the death of Qalāwūn. In fact the book then peters out, although it does include an account of the sultan's death, but no account of the Conquest of Tripoli in 688, despite other sources highlighting that this was at least as widely celebrated textually as was that of al-Marqab, which is extensively discussed in various textual forms.[64]


وبشارة بمقام الاطاف
وكتب مولانا السلطان جوابه
بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم
بقوة الله باقبال دولة
تعالى السلطان الملك المنصور
كلام قلاوون

The manuscript layout of *Tashrīf* does not only highlight the importance of chronology, it in facts also puts the stress on a subject that is familiar from my discussion of *Faḍl*: the importance of the *dīwān*, here especially focused on compiled documents. In the entirety of the manuscript of *Tashrīf,* by far the most eye-catching headings are those which signal the letters that were part of the diplomatic correspondence between Qalāwūn and the Ilkhanid ruler Aḥmad Tegüder. This correspondence, which

[59] A non-exhaustive sampling: *Tashrīf,* 17, 18, 20-21, 24, 43, 44, 52, 68, 91, 92, 112, 126.
[60] As in *Tashrīf,* 23-24, 34, 50.
[61] *Tashrīf,* 50-52.
[62] ʿIzz al-Dīn b. Shaddād also very clearly highlights the changes in years: *Selimiye 2306,* 14v, 27v, 51v, 68v, 93v, 152v. Note that all these headings are situated on the verso page (as are all other major subdivisions, such as the yearly obituaries and the virtues section at the end of the manuscript), a dominant page position considering the fact that Arabic books are read from right to left.
[63] *Arabe 1704 (Tashrīf al-ayyām),* 1v, 46v, 108v, 258v, 296r. The one change that is not noted in larger script is found at the top of a page (108v) immediately above a *dhikr* in larger script, and is thus still easily visible.
[64] See for example a letter sent to Yemen about this conquest written by Tāj al-Dīn b. al-Athīr quoted in al-ʿUmarī, *Masālik al-abṣār,* 12:267-268. He also wrote a letter celebrating the conquest of Marqab to al-Ashraf Khalīl. Idem 266-267.

also has a prominent place in *Faḍl* and in a number of other historical texts, has received


بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم
بقوة الله باقبال
تعالى فان
فرمان احمد
الى سلطان مصر
اما بعد فالذي يجب على العاقل بذل الجهد

quite some attention, but none of these studies have really discussed the function of including such correspondence in these texts. I will return to this in more detail in 6.2.1., but for now it may suffice to note the visual prominence these texts were allocated in the manuscripts, as is visible in the reproductions on this page. While the letters sent by Tegüder were designated by the Persian term *firmān,* Qalāwūn's single included answer is called "*kalām Qalāwūn*" ("Qalāwūn's discourse"). I have included pictures of Qalāwūn's first answer (previous page)[65] and one of Tegüder's second letter (this page).[66] Both show clearly the larger-size script and the great prominence of these sections in the text's general layout.

Due to this prominence of compiled material and the text's general interest in activities related to the *dīwān,* we may tentatively conclude that similar ideas were at work in the textual construction of this text as in *Faḍl.* As we shall see, other less prominent elements from the text similarly stress the *dīwān,* and the linguistic registers used throughout the text may also be brought into relation with such an objective.

5.2.5 al-Alṭāf al-khafiyya

Only the third of originally at least four volumes of al-Ashraf Khalīl's *sīra* survives, and this deals only with the years 690-691/1291-1292. Since al-Ashraf Khalīl only ascended the throne a year earlier, in 689/1290, it also seems likely that the first volume would have contained information about his pre-sultanate activities, but this is once more entirely impossible to ascertain, as no later text quotes from this volume. It is in any case sure that the first or second volume would have contained extensive descriptions and literary celebrations of the conquest of Acre which took place at the beginning of his reign, and which is referred to near the end of the extant volume as something that has been mentioned before.[67] On the occasion of this conquest several congratulory poems were written that can be found in other texts – indeed, two such poems close off Shāfi''s *Faḍl.* In its surviving part, the *sīra* of al-Ashraf Khalīl follows a less strictly

[65] *Arabe 1704 (Tashrīf al-ayyām),* 18v.
[66] *Arabe 1704 (Tashrīf al-ayyām),* 135v. The start of the first letter, in similarly grand script is found on 9r.
[67] *Alṭāf,* 69: على ما تقدم شرحه في هذه السيرة الفضيلة

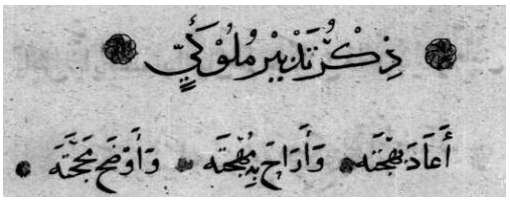
annalistic format than *Tashrīf al-ayyām*, but it does line up the thematic *dhikrs* around which the text is built up in a chronological way and also provides quite a few exact dates, although it does not highlight the changes in years.[68]

Anne Troadec evaluates the text as:

> le plus hétérogène du point de vue de la narration, puisque le *continuum* chronologique n'est pas respecté, mais présente une grande coherence thématique: toutes les sections sont destinées à mettre en valeur les vertus du souverain.[69]

I disagree almost entirely with Troadec's claims on this particular text: I believe the text *is* in fact mostly chronologically ordered (unlike *Faḍl,* which I would call by far the most heterogeneously narrated text in the corpus), and, more importantly, that it was only partially interested in highlighting the sultan's virtues, and at least as much in showcasing the importance of the written word as one of the sultan's most important fundaments in his *dawla*, as also evident in *Faḍl* and to a lesser degree in *Tashrīf.*

There is one especially clear example of this in one of the text's chapters, which is introduced by a *dhikr* that foregoes the traditional function of introducing or summarising the following contents, instead suggestively referring to it in *sajʿ*:[70]



Report of the royal measure / which reinstated his gaiety/ gladdened his soul / and elucidated his method.[71]

This heading precedes a section on al-Ashraf Khalīl's reorganisation of sultanic correspondence, by making his viceroy Badr al-Dīn Baydarā and vizier Shams al-Dīn [b. al-Salʿūs] take care of minor correspondence. The bulk of this chapter then discusses the loftiness of sultanic correspondence, starting off with a discussion of how it had been of the highest importance since time immemorial but that it had been corrupted by al-Muʿizz Aybak and his successors, to finally be duly reinstated by al-Ashraf Khalīl, who is

[68] *Alṭāf,* 6, 15, 24, 39, 54, 59, 64.
[69] Troadec, "Les Mamelouks dans l'espace syrien", 73.
[70] Of *al-Alṭāf al-khafiyya*'s twenty *dhikr* headings, only one other has a similar "non-informative" construction, while a second one is both informative and "literary" (by using rhyme). *Alṭāf,* 41, 49.
[71] Munich: Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, orientalische und asiatische Handschriften, Cod. arab 405 (*al-Alṭāf al-khafiyya*), 51v.

praised for this action.[72] Here, the *dhikr* has lost its function of briefly communicating the contents to follow. Rather, Ibn ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir uses the format of the *dhikr* heading not as a signal for what is to follow but to construct a variation of its central message: the praise of the mutually reinforcing bond between sultan and scribe, for the actions described are said to have gladdened the sultan. This last aspect is furthermore stressed by the section ending on a most likely self-written praise poem that uses themes and motifs from the debates between the pen and the sword. This was in fact a well-established genre — though perhaps it is more adequate to see it as a particular set of discourses that appeared in various contexts — that appeared not only in Arabic but goes back to the ancient Near Eastern literary practice of textual debates.[73] By the time of our authors, many great earlier authors had participated in this particular debate, in which they often argued directly or indirectly for the primacy of the pen: through a display of the advantages of language and writing and by being written in a virtuoso register that showcased the author's superior command of language.[74] Our authors at several points worked elements of the discursive tradition into their own works. Some are even said to have composed specific works (presumably *rasāʾil*) on the topic. Shāfiʿ b. ʿAlī told al-Ṣafadī himself he wrote a work entitled *Al-durr al-munaẓẓam fī mufākharat al-sayf wa-l-qalam* ("The systematised pearls: the boasting of the sword and the pen"),[75] and al-Ṣafadī quotes and approves of the literary merit (*jawwada-hā*) of a relatively short prose text by ʿAlāʾ al-Dīn b. ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir entitled *Risāla fī l-mufāḍala bayna l-ramḥ wa-l-sayf* ("Epistle on the comparison between the spear and the sword"), which seems to have been tangentially related to the topic.[76]

These are the first lines immediately following Ibn ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir's heading:

المكاتبات السلطانية كانت لها حرمة في قديم الزمان * وإنها لا يظفر بها الا ذو حظ عظيم
من الملوك الأكابر وأعيان الأعيان * وتُورّث للأعقاب * كتوريث الأنساب وان تطاولت الأحقاب
* وتُدّخَر للفخار * ويفتخر كلّ بذلك الإدّخار *

[72] This type of argument is of course something of a scribal trope. See for example the paraphrase of our author's colleague Ibn al-Mukarram's praise of Qalāwūn's lavish endowing of the medical sciences in Muhanna, *The World in a Book,* 65.
[73] For a historical overview and discussion of some typical examples of the "genre", see among others: G.J. van Gelder, "The Conceit of Pen and Sword: On an Arabic Literary Debate", *Journal of Semitic Studies,* 22/2 (1987), 329-360; J. Hämeen-Anttila, "The Essay and Debate". See also various contributions in Reinink G.J., Vanstiphout H.L.J. (eds.), *Dispute Poems and Dialogues in the Ancient and Mediaeval Near East: Forms and Types of Literary Debates in Semitic and Related Literatures* (Leuven: Peeters, 1991). For a very recent cross-cultural perspective, see M. van Berkel, "The People of the Pen", 440-446.
[74] See for a description of such a text written by al-Ṣafadī: Gully, *The Culture of Letter Writing*, 54. See also Chapter 3 of that work in general.
[75] Al-Ṣafadī, *Aʿyān al-aṣr*, 2:507.
[76] Al-Ṣafadī, *al-Wāfī l-wafāyāt*, 22:36-38.

> There was a sacredness to sultanic correspondence in the old times, and it was only circulated among those endowed with great fortune among the great kings and the most eminent among the elite. [For indeed, this correspondence] appoints progeny as heirs, as it appoints [a person] as heir of a lineage; and it lengthens the period [in which that lineage continues], it accumulates for the glorious, and by this amassing everyone is glorified.[77]

The poem itself runs as follows. It uses plural forms after the first line to denote the pens, and a singular form to denote the sword, perhaps to highlight the collaborative effort of *kuttāb* as opposed to the singular military power of the sultan:

إن للأقلام صُونًا — مثل صَون للسُيوفِ
هذه تمضى برِزقٍ — مثل هذا لِحتوفِ
بهما يقضى ويمضى — كل مرسوم شريفِ
لها سِلمًا وحربًا — منه تفريق الأُلوفِ
هذه بين سُطورٍ — هذا بين صفوفِ
فبِذِي رفع صروف — وبذي دفع صروفِ
واذا كانا سوآءً — من صريرٍ وصريفِ
ولذى حفظ حروفٍ — ولذى صون حروفِ
كم لهاذى من جنيبٍ — ولهاذى من رديفِ

> For the pens there is preservation, such as preservation for the swords
> These ones pursue a livelihood, as that one [pursues] deaths
> By these two every noble decree is carried out and executed
> Peace and war are their [business], [while] by it thousands are separated
> These ones are situated between lines, that one between ranks
> By this one misfortunes are removed, while by that one they are caused
> And they are equal in crying out and squealing
> To this one is the custody of letters, to that one the preservation of sword edges
> Oh, how that one is on one side, while that one is following next in line[78]

While the poem starts out on a fairly equal tone, throughout the following lines it is clear that the pen is associated with far more positive qualities than the sword, especially when the poet says how "by this one misfortunes (*ṣurūf*) are removed, while by that one they are caused", implying that one of the roles of the pens is to clean up the mess made by the sword. This resonates nicely with what Ibn ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir argues

[77] IAZ, *Alṭāf*, 36.
[78] *Alṭāf*, 38-39.

troughout this section, namely that there is an association of a sultan's political success to the correspondence written in his name. As such, while detailing the sultan's initiatives to put the administration of the kingdom in order — he uses the term *tadbīr,* or "arrangement", a common term in Arabic Mirrors for Princes in the title — Ibn ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir takes this a step further in his masterful composition, by claiming that the sultan's authority is not only established by the help of swords and manpower, but perhaps more so by those that articulate his claim to power in eloquent prose. The association with a longstanding literary tradition associated with scribes furthermore serves to embed our author's discourse in one of timeless literary legitimacy, and amplifies the text's qualities of performing a scribal identity.

The idea of the cruciality of the pen in the sultan's *dawla* is rather pervasive in this text: consider for example the ending lines of this praise poem found in a section that deals first with al-Ashraf Khalīl's sitting in the *dār al-ʿadl* and then with the low levels of the Nile in the year 691 / 1292:

بسيرته الحسنى يفوت مؤرخ مَدَى كلّ مَن أرخى العنان وأرّخا
فلا زال نشر المدح فيه معطّراً وعَرْف الثنا والشكر منه مضمّخا

By [writing the sultan's] lofty *sīra* the historian makes escape
the period of everyone who loosens the reins and writes history
And the propagation of praise does not stop being perfumed
since the fragrance of eulogy and thanks is perfumed by him.[79]

Panegyrical poems of course typically establish an explicit link between the panegyrist and the dedicatee, but it is important here that this is done on the level of historiography and praise and not by simple referral to some form of patronage. For these two domains were deemed essential to the project of writing *sīra* as propounded in the preserved introductions written by our authors. While we do not have its introduction, I believe it's fair to say that *Alṭāf* (much more obviously than *Tashrīf*) very clearly communicated similar ideas. We shall indeed see below that other parts of the text made similar claims about the centrality of the *dīwān*. The abovementioned chapter is thus quite representative of the general argument found in *Alṭāf,* although it is of course only ascertainable for the single surviving volume. Yet there is one more aspect of this partial text which quite forcefully though implicitly stresses the importance of administration: the fact that nearly half of the manuscript (80 folio's of the manuscript's

[79] *Alṭāf,* 56.

total 182) is taken up by two *waqfs,* or "endowment deeds".[80] These related *waqfs*, which discuss the endowment of Qalāwūn's mausoleum by his son al-Ashraf Khalīl, are not documents typically associated with the *dīwān al-inshāʾ,* which, as we have seen (and as the section referred to above even seems to make clear), identified itself predominantly with high-profile correspondence, but apparently in this case they did have a hand in the matter. Willem Flinterman who has discussed the contents of these *waqf* documents at length presumed that they were written by Ibn ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir himself, and that the inclusion of these documents in the *sīra*:

> is less arbitrary than it may seem. The regnal history discusses the endowment at some length. Moreover, the inclusion of the *waqf* document completed the codex as a royal memorabilium and an example for posterity. The history of al-Ashraf's success as king, combined with the testimony to his good deeds and devotion towards his father, make the book an eminent product of double *memoria*. The fact that the documents were included in this codex demonstrates the high symbolic value of such documents as vehicles of royal representation.[81]

Flinterman's evaluation here is strongly influenced by the legitimisation narrative, in which the *sīra*'s are primarily seen as expressions of sultanic claims to authority. And indeed, the *waqf* document itself starts with a rather lengthy list of the sultan's titles. However, it is noteworthy that this list is preceded by an explicit note that "[the sultan] ordered it to be written, accurately drawn up, elucidated, and recorded".[82] This type of claim hardly seems unusual and fits in perfectly with the legal jargon used for such documents, but the word choices are in fact quite interesting. To begin with, the first two words *amara bi-kitābati-hi,* are a variation of the crucial phrase we came across in Shāfiʿ's *Faḍl*, the association of the command (*amr*) to the act of writing (*kitāba*, derived from the verb *kataba*) as its fulfillment (see 5.2.3. above). The following three words are not strictly necessary and function mostly within the logic of rhyme, rhythm, and the literary propensity to provide strings of near-synonyms. Yet they also stress the wide-ranging importance of this seemingly humble act of writing: *taḥrīr,* "accurately drawing up" is derived from the root letters for freedom, and the verb in its second form (from which this particular form is derived) has a causative meaning, thus imply a freeing, the idea that the sultan's command is freed from its mute shackles by being committed into

[80] Moberg did not include the *waqfs* in his edition, but he did publish the documents separately in the article "Zwei ägyptische waqf-urkunden aus dem jahre 691/1292" in *Le monde oriental* 12 (1918), 1-64.
[81] Flinterman, "The Cult of Qalāwūn", 162-163.
[82] Munich Cod. arab 405, 102v. I have added "the sultan", but it should be noted that in the Arabic original the subject of these verbs only follows *after* the quoted string of verbs.

legally accepted documentary prose; similarly, *īḍāḥ,* meaning "elucidation", is derived from the term for making something clear, implying here that it is the *kātib*'s pen which allows the command to become clearly communicable. Note that these two verbs furthermore resonate in interesting ways with the text title's guide phrase *al-Alṭāf al-khafiyya,* the "benevolences manifest", in which *khafiyya* had important connotations of being hidden and brought to light: these verbs can be seen as instrumental in that regard, they are the actions by which these "benevolences" are made clear. Lastly, *tasṭīr* is again a second form verbal noun (like *taḥrīr* above) and is derived from the verb denoting the drawing of lines. Significantly, it is the verb used by our author in his introduction to the *sīra* of Baybars to denote his necessary task as the one who should put down the sultan's life in writing (notably, here also in the second causative form). Of course this should not be overstated, for all these terms are grammatically related to the verb *amara* ("to command") and the sultan as grammatical subject, whose impressive string of titles dwarfs the stature of this initial statement,[83] but they do draw the attention for at least a little while to the crucial contribution of the *kātib* in creating this document. Hence, I believe the inclusion of the *waqfs* should not be seen merely as functioning as "royal representation" as Flinterman argues, but like all other compiled documents in this text as stressing the close and indeed crucial association between the sultan and his eloquent servant, whose role is exemplified through his writing.

5.2.6 Sīrat al-Malik al-Naṣīr

The original extent of Shāfi''s *sīra* of al-Nāṣir Muḥammad is unknown, but the surviving part does contain an interesting narrative construction that reiterates themes found especially in *Rawḍ* and *Faḍl,* and which was likely significant for the larger textual whole. Like Baybars and his father Qalāwūn before him (and perhaps unlike al-Ashraf Khalīl), al-Nāṣir Muḥammad's ascension of the throne was not a straightforward process: he was first put on the throne as an infant and quickly dethroned again, only to be reinstalled a few years later, but then again only to be dominated by the two powerful amirs Salār and Baybars al-Jāshnikīr. The manuscript Arabe 1705 starts during this second reign and details events during the years 703-705/1304-1306, but then it jumps a few years ahead to 708/1308 to start detailing the sultan's defection to Karak and abdication of the

[83] Interestingly, the titles employed here are nearly identical to those quoted in the *khuṭba* written for a *futuwwa* ceremony included earlier in the *sīra,* but in a different order, which does imply some kind of fixed titulature. *Alṭāf,* 67.

throne.[84] This latter part starts at folio 68v and continues until 105v, containing an account of the events and a *taqlīd* (diploma of investiture) written in name of the Caliph for al-Naṣir Muḥammad's instatement as sultan, which Shāfiʿ claims to have written himself. Similar to how the *khuṭba* worked in Ibn ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir's first section of *al-Rawḍ al-zāhir*, this is the culmination point of this narrative section, after which the annalistic account of the sultan's reign is picked up again and the elevated register of the preceding section is toned down. This only continues for a few more pages however, for the manuscript ends on folio 107v, but it is likely that the *sīra* would have continued for quite some time as only the very beginning of al-Nāṣir Muḥammad's third reign is described and al-Ṣafadī claims that the *sīra* consisted of multiple volumes. Furthermore, Shāfiʿ lived for twenty more years after these events, so he could have extended this part significantly. Due to the text not being published at the moment, I have supported my discussion in the following pages with a greater number of direct quotes and translations from the text than for the previous better known texts.

The section on al-Nāṣir Muḥammad's defection, abdication and ultimate re-ascension of the throne in 709 reads very much as a thematic whole for at least five reasons. A first is the fact that this part immediately follows an account that is dated to the year 705. The intervening four years are discussed only in very broad terms insofar as they were deemed relevant to this section's narrative. Second is the sustained *sajʿ* register — although the author does switch between very elevated and more straight forward registers. Third, in the first part of the *sīra*, Shāfiʿ concludes the majority of accounts (*dhikrs*) with a variation of the typical statement that an event happened "in this way" (*ʿalā hādhihi l-ṣūra*), which he completely abandons in this later part.[85] Fourth is the fact that its narrative construction of departure towards Syria and eventual glorious return to Cairo, which I have also discerned as a structural feature of Ibn ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir's *sīra* of Baybars, makes for a cohesive narrative whole. And lastly, the introductory lines of this section bear a strong resemblance to the traditional and obligatory *taḥmīd* section at the start of any Islamic text. The integration of this text in the context of the *sīra* is however clear from the fact that Shāfiʿ refers to things he has mentioned earlier and suggests that the following narrative should be read as a reaction to those events.

The section starts as follows:

[84] There is no noticeable gap in the manuscript, and the title of the new section is even spread across a verso and recto page, so if it is indeed a gap it must be a copyist's mistake. As noted above, *Ḥusn al-manāqib* also contains a gap of five years.

[85] Arabe 1705, 9r, 13r, 15r, 18r, 22v, 23v, 35r, 46r, 49r, 57r, 65v, 67r. While not an unusual phrase per se (Ibn ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir also uses it three times in *Tashrīf,* 29, 88), it does seems to have been a mannerism of Shāfiʿ to use it so extensively. He also uses variations of it several times in *Faḍl* (28, 38, 59, 69, 100, 114, 118, 139, 140, 150, 156, 162) and *Ḥusn* (66, 113, 118, 172, 264, 321).

ذكر عود الملك لمولانا السلطان مرة ثالثة
لله سبحانه وتعالى بمولانا السلطان الطاف وأي ألطاف * وممن لم نزل من يد نصرته دانيه القطاف * وظفّر بمناويه بإتاحة القدر * وأخذ بناصية معانديه يحسن ما للتوكل على الله تعالى من ظفر *

An account of the return of kingship to our lord the sultan for a third time
Praise be to God who raised the attaining of sublime heights — that is, benevolences — by way of our lord the sultan, and from whom the hand of his support does not descend, the harvest of which is brought close to him. And He makes him victorious by his intentions for the facilitation of destiny, taking hold of the forelock of his enemies to benefit the victory that belongs to [those who] trust in God most high.[86]

This highly laudatory and grammatically complex introductory discourse continues for about nine more lines and eventually concludes with this statement:

ونوزع في ميراث ملك أبيه ويأبى الله إلا أن يرد الحق في نصابه * ويغيد الملك لمن هو أولى به * وقد تقدم ما أعتمده معه أولاً وثانياً من مماليك والده الشهيد من معاندة الله تعالى وإنتزاع الملك من يده ويأبا الله إلا أن يؤتيه أياه * وعصبه ما يستحقه مما أرضى الله فيه وأباه فأباه * وهو صابر محتسب صارعاً لله في حُسن تدبيره وعلى قدم الإبتهال منتصب سائلاً من الله العون * مبتهلاً اليه في حسن الحراسة والصون*

The inheritance of his father's kingship was contested [but] God willed rightfulness to return to its origin, and he caused the kingship to return to who is most deserving of it. It has been mentioned before how the *mamlūks* of his father the martyr [Qalāwūn] employed him a first and second time in resistance to God the most high and [how] they removed kingship from the hand [of our lord the sultan], but God willed that his sign was accomplished. And our lord the sultan applied himself with zeal to what he was entitled to, as pleases God, and he was turned down and rejected. But he is patient in anticipation of God's reward, and struggling for it in the excellence of his management, and in applying prayer, upright in asking God for help, praying to him for the blessing of sustained preservation.[87]

This introduction already highlights a number of important features to follow: the sultan's being chosen by God (later on more abstractly referred to as being favoured by fate), the accusatory tone against Qalāwūn's *mamlūks* who dominated al-Nāṣir's first two

[86] Arabe 1705, 69r
[87] Arabe 1705, 69v-70r.

reigns, and the departure-return structure which is evident from the title and the suggestion that al-Nāṣir overcame his difficulties and established his Godly ordained authority. I will in the following discuss by way of a number of examples how this was rendered into historical narrative.

In the way our author applied the departure-return structure this text, it results in strong symmetrical qualities. This is for example clear from the extensive descriptions of the ceremonial enshrining these momentous events in the appropriate pomp. However, more than merely praising the sultan, Shāfiʿ uses this symmetrical construction to stress the narrative growth of the sultan's glory: while his departure is framed in glorious language but with several comments denoting the impure intentions of his surroundings, upon his return, any trace of doubt is erased and the sultan ascends the throne in excellent glorious fashion. Consider for example how his departure from the Citadel is described as: "and he descended from his Citadel accompanied by his enemies though they made believe that they were his helpers".[88] There is a constant tension here, from which al-Nāṣir wisely escapes to squash it upon his return. Contrastingly, the event of the ascension of the Citadel is described as follows:

> وكان قد عزم على الإقامة يوم عيده * والطلوع إلى القلعة ثانيه بمقتضى يمن الطالع وسعيده * ثم بدى له أنه لا طالع اسعد من رقيه إلى منبر الملك وطلوعه * وعوده والعود أحمد إلى منبر سلطنته ورجوعه * [...] وقد أستغنى ببيض الصفائح عن سود الصحائف النجومية * ووثق بمتونها في جلا الشك والريب عملاً ونية *
>
> He had decided to celebrate the day of his Feast [of Breaking at Birkat al-Jubb, see excerpt quoted below] and to ascend the Citadel on the second day [of the Feast] in accordance with the good fortune and radiance of the ascendant star of destiny. Then it appeared to him that there was no ascendant star more radiant than his rise to the pulpit of kingship, his ascension of [the throne], and his return – and finishing what one started is commendable – to the pulpit of his sultanate and his restitution. [...] And by the white [edges?] of swords he had dispensed with the black of the astronomical pages, trusting in their body texts on the doubt manifest and the suspicion, acting and intending.[89]

The astronomical metaphors and the sultan's following of good fortune already make clear that the return to power should be seen as more than a renewal. Rather this was

[88] Arabe 1705, 72r-72v: وخرج من قلعته في أعدايه منهم وأن أوهموا أنهم أنصاره
[89] Arabe 1705, 91v. I have excised four cola's mostly filled with astronomical metaphors.

an action of excelling, an attainment of a predestined position by way of overcoming the doubts and uncertainties of his second reign.

While the above described actions are both directly related to the sultan, Shāfiʿ's symmetry in this section is not always linear and plays with motifs that are spread across the section. We have above already seen how he describes the actions of al-Nāṣir Muḥammad's very young son who accompanied by the sultan's harem presents himself as a worthy successor in the excerpt quoted above in 2.1.2 by way of a rich banquet at which courtly ceremonial was performed in honour of the young son. This scene is in fact mirrored and extended at the end of the section when al-Nāṣir Muḥammad returns to Cairo:

ولما يزل حتى وصل إلى بركة الجب فكان الأمير الإسفهلار سيف الدين سلار نائب السلطنة المعظمة قد خرج ممن بقي بالقاهرة من العساكر المنصورة * فتلقي مولانا السلطان على ظاهر قبل النزول بالبركة هو والعساكر المنصورة * وترجّلوا جميعًا وقبّلوا الأرض ويده الشريفة * وغدت طوائفهم بموكبه مطيفة * وترجّل خلد الله سلطانه للأمير سيف الدين سلار إيناسًا لوحشته * ووفاءً بعهد أمانه وتسكينًا لدوعته * فإنّ المشار إليه كان خائفًا مترقّبًا * لا يجد دون مهلكه مطلبًا * على أنّه ما خرج عن الطاعة ولا خلع ربقتها من عنقه * ولا أغبّ بمواصلات ترامیه إلى الخدمة بسلوك منهج النصح وطرقه * ثم إنّ مولانا السلطان أقام ببركة الجب يوم نزولها وهو يوم الثلثا التاسع والعشرين من شهر رمضان المعظّم وبات بها وأصبح وقد أحضر المنبر وخطيب الجامع الحاكمي القاضي عماد الدين ابن السكّري فصلى بمولانا السلطان صلاة عيد الفطر بدهليزه المنصور وبه مد سماط العيد المنتوع من المأكل مما تشتهيه الأنفس وتلذ الأعين وخلع مولانا السلطان على العادة

[The sultan] did not stop [going from resting place to resting place] until he reached Birkat al-Jabb. And the army commander (*amīr al-isfahlār*) Sayf al-Dīn Salār, viceroy of the glorified sultanate, had come our from among those who had stayed in Cairo of the victorious armies, and he and [these] victorious armies met our lord the sultan outside before they alighted at the Birka. They all dismounted, and they kissed the ground and [the sultan's] noble hand, and their groups became encircled by [the sultan's] convoy. [Then the sultan] dismounted for the amir Sayf al-Dīn Salār in friendliness to his cheerlessness, fulfilling the agreement of his security and pacifying his fright, for the aforementioned [Salār] was frightened and fearful, searching for a way out of his [imminent] destruction, entreating that he had not left obedience [to the sultan], and had not taken off its noose from his neck. He did not tarry with the communications that came to his service by way of the procedure and methods of good advice. After that, our lord the sultan stayed in Birkat al-Jubb for the day of his alighting. This was Tuesday the 29th of the glorified month Ramaḍān and he stayed the night there, and the pulpit and the preacher of the Ḥākim mosque, the *qāḍī* ʿImād al-Dīn b. al-Sukkarī, were brought. He prayed with our lord the sultan the prayer of the Feast of Breaking in his victorious *dihlīz* tent, where the Feast banquet was laid out with all

the varieties of food souls may desire and by which eyes may be pleased. And our lord the sultan distributed *khilʿa*'s according to habit.[90]

Of course, such descriptions of ceremonial are not exceptional, and that similar things would happen at such moments is also self-evident in the context of strongly codified court norms – i.e. the courtly habitus I referred to above – but the positioning of these excerpts more or less at either end of the section highlights Shāfiʿ's symmetrical construction, as well as the ways he played with motifs of ideal rule to construct an engaging narrative. In the first excerpt he does so by transplanting these practices to the young boy ʿAlāʾ al-Dīn who perfectly takes over his father's duties, but in the second excerpt the sultan himself, now a fully grown man, is presented as a paragon of ideal rule. There is an element of physical growth here: Shāfiʿ as such suggests that it is the sultan's coming of age which allows him to finally triumph over his oppressors and to come into his own as ideal ruler. Furthermore, in this scene, the return to obedience — a veritable historical topos of the period — is interwoven with the sultan's own performance of his magnanimity. The "enemies" who made believe that they were "allies" are finally either chased off or brought under the sultan's newly asserted authority.

The symmetry of the "story" is as such unequal and recurring motifs are used as a means to stress growth and excellence. Other elements of symmetry are used as contrast: the most obvious of these is the respective portrayal of al-Nāṣir Muḥammad (and by extension the son in the account above) and Baybars al-Jāshnikīr who reigned as sultan for nine months while al-Nāṣir Muḥammad was in Syria. While the first is portrayed as having fortune and fate by his side — for example by way of the celestial metaphors noted above, or in an anecdote involving a miraculous escape from a crumbling bridge[91] — the latter is immediately from the start portrayed as an incompetent ruler who only sits on the throne by the grace of his supporters. Once those supporters start switching sides to al-Nāṣir Muḥammad's camp, Baybars' authority starts to crumble. This crumbling support is also symbolically refracted: when the news reaches him of al-Nāṣir Muḥammad moving towards Cairo with growing military support, he is said to have thrown his turban on the ground in anger.[92]

[90] Arabe 1705, 90v-91v.

[91] Arabe 1705, 74r-74v. Other versions of this anecdote are related by amongst others: al-Mufaḍḍal b. Abī l-Faḍāʾil, *Histoire des sultans mamelouks,* ed. and transl. E. Blochet (Turnhout: Brepols, 1982), vol. 3:141; Ibn Taghrī-Birdī, *al-Manhal al-ṣāfī,* 10:272-273 (though specifically attributed to Ibn Kathīr).

[92] ولما بلغه أن الماء من العساكر المنصورة قد رجع إلى مَجاريه * وأنّ حديث عزم الملك الناصر الممتع عدم مُجاريه * أخذ بعمامته فرمي بها الأرض * وغض طرفه عن قصد معاندة مولانا السلطان وما كان أحقّه من أول أمره بالعض *

Considering the importance attached to headgear by Mamluk sultans, this is a highly symbolical relinquishment of authority.[93]

The contrasting symmetry is not only stressed on the narrative level, but also structurally posited. Consider for example the titles of these four consecutive *dhikrs*:

> ذكر امر ركن الدين بيبرس وما جرى له من النزول عن الملك والخروج من القلعة.
> ذكر عدم مساعدة الاقدار للمذكور.
> ذكر سعادة نطق مولانا السلطان وحدسه الصحيح ولا شبهة ان الملوك نقيه الاذهان.
> ذكر حلول مولانا السلطان بكرسي مملكة بقلعة الجبل المحروس.

> The case of Rukn al-Dīn Baybars and what befell him in descending from kingship and leaving the citadel.
> The lack of support of fate for the aforementioned [Rukn al-Dīn Baybars].
> The bliss of the utterance of our lord the sultan and his correct surmise – and there is no doubt that kings are the pure of minds.
> The ascension of our lord the sultan to the throne of his kingdom in the Citadel.[94]

The forces of fate are strong here: Baybars is defined as having destiny against him — in large part due to his own actions, which are amongst other things described with the important signifier "corruption" (*fasād*)[95] — while al-Nāṣir Muḥammad is basically flying on the wings of fortune — the third of these sections, which contains a speech in *sajʿ* by the sultan, is even concluded by the statement that "there is no doubt that Egypt['s future] is auspicious and this good omen is a confirmation [of that]".[96]

Conspicuously absent from this narrative and indeed from much of the *sīra* in general is Shāfiʿ himself as the *kātib* whose presence was so crucial in *al-Faḍl al-maʾthūr* and the able abridger who constructed *Ḥusn al-manāqib* on the basis of *al-Rawḍ al-zāhir*. Although it is not spelled out as such, it seems likely that our author at this point did not enjoy the same position towards the sultan as he did a few decades earlier. Yet he is not entirely absent, and he does make his presence felt at a crucial point at the end of this section, as the author of the Caliph's *taqlīd*. This document is introduced as follows:

Arabe 1705, 86v. Note also that Baybars is never named by his regnal title but always by a reference such as "the aforementioned" (*al-mushār ilay-hi*) or by his personal name "Baybars", whereas al-Nāṣir Muḥammad is either called by his regnal title or by the reverential *mawlā-nā al-sulṭān* (our lord the sultan).

[93] Fuess, A. "Sultan with horns: The Political Significance of Headgear in the Mamluk Empire" *MSR* 12/2 (2008), 71-94.

[94] Arabe 1705, 86r-90r.

[95] Arabe 1705, 89r. See for its use in the Qurʾān: F. Mathewson Denny, "Corruption", *EQ*, vol. 1:439-440.

[96] Arabe 1705, 90r.

وأنشا المملوك جامع هذه السيرة التي هي في الحقيقة عنوان السيّر والمتضمنة ما أرى به ملكها على من عبر من الملوك وغير تقليدًا مناصبًا للواقعة ترتاح إليه كل أذن سامعه وضمنه صورة العهد المجدّد من أمير المؤمنين لمولانا السلطان خلد الله ملكه

The *mamlūk* who compiled this *sīra* — which, in truth, is the epitome of *sīra*'s, the contents of which are what its king shows beyond [the deeds of those] kings who passed and [whose days have] elapsed[97] — composed the diploma of investiture to be declared for the occasion, which satisfied every ear that heard it, and its contents are a copy of the renewed contract from the Commander of the Faithful for our Lord the Sultan —may God perpetuate his kingship.[98]

The statement is of course significant in the context of Shāfiʿ's claims to historiographical authority, but it is also contextually significant because of its relation to the preceding part and the text of the *taqlīd* itself, although we need to read beyond the pages of the *sīra* itself to evaluate the full weight of this statement. When Baybars al-Jāshnikīr ascended the throne, he too had a *taqlīd* written for his ceremonial investiture, and al-Ṣafadī tell us that this *taqlīd* was written by Shāfiʿ's relative ʿAlāʾ al-Dīn b. ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir — one of the reasons why al-Nāṣir Muḥammad is said to have "hated" him.[99] Shāfiʿ's claim (not confirmed by any historian) to have written al-Nāṣir Muḥammad's own *taqlīd* may be seen in the light of the competition between him and his relatives that is visible in *al-Faḍl al-maʾthūr.* The present *taqlīd* suggests something along these lines when it says "this contract is in disagreement with any contract that are like it for whom is like [the sultan]",[100] thus clearly positioning the diploma itself as a reaction against a former contract, which we can contextually surmise to have been ʿAlāʾ al-Dīn's diploma for Baybars.

As such, Shāfiʿ is eventually once more able to steer the attention at least for some time back to himself. Of course, as in *Faḍl,* he had been present all along by way of the intricate prose that dominates the *sīra* as well as through an earlier quoted document and poetry, but here he comes to the foreground as an active participant in history. The question whether this *taqlīd* written by Shāfiʿ was also effectively used in the sultan's ceremonial third investiture, or if it was only a textual exercise to write it, in line with at least one other document quoted by the author in *Faḍl* — about which, see below – is not really relevant here then. Within the *sīra*, the *taqlīd* serves to refract the preceding discourse in the elevated stylistic register of actual *inshāʾ* writing, and not the relatively

[97] Note the typical evaluation of the function of "history", as also expressed in the introductions to our texts.
[98] Arabe 1705, 96r.
[99] Al-Ṣafadī, *al-Wāfī bi-l-wafāyāt,* 15:216.
Arabe 1705, 96v.[100]

هذا عهد ناقض ما سواه لمن سواه من العهود

toned down register used in writing history, and as such brings the text firmly into the domain of chancery writing where the other *sīra*'s comfortably rested.

Intermittent conclusions

According to Paul Ricoeur, the historiographical endeavour of structuring, or "emplotting" events into a coherent narrative is broadly similar to how such narratives are constructed in fictional writing, the *mise en intrigue* in both working according to a cognitive understanding of time. Indeed, in the above sections we have seen to which degree the lines may be blurred. Yet a distinction between truth and fiction is fundamentally unhelpful in this regard, for our authors did not make up the lives of the sultans they were describing, but only chose to represent events that most certainly took place in narrative ways that were familiar to them and their audiences. Rather than merely noting down the events and the dates at which these occured, they actively made sense of them in an engaging narrative construction. Perhaps the most important result of these constructions is that it greatly enhances the author's agency. We have seen that, as announced in the introductions, throughout the texts the authors' contributions and that of the chancery institution they represented were shown to be crucial to the sultan's *dawla,* an aspect that is even further stressed by the compiled material which we will turn to in the following chapter. The fact that this was the major instrumental part of the three-pronged argument for the writing of *sīra*, shows that these were cohesive texts, executing their goals through narrative and discourse. The great narrative constructions discussed for three of the six *sīra*'s, in which our authors engaged with the timeless qualities of heroic narrative structures to emplot their versions of the sultan's life and deeds, may be seen as an active rendering of the two other parts of that three-pronged argument: the exemplarity of history and the exemplarity of this specific sultan.

The writing of history is thus always a narrative undertaking, but this does not only operate on the level of the grand narrative constructions discussed above, but also in the ways discrete events, themes and figures are embedded within or in relation to those narratives. Typically, these elements have been seen as showcasing the sultan as a paragon of ideal rule, but beyond a very basic evaluation this concept of "ideal rule", which is not as such addressed by any of our authors unless by way of very general categories of merit (*faḍl*) and virtue (*manāqib*), is not developed. In the following I will first problematise this concept, and then move on to two clusters of examples which show the historiographical uses of ideas about ideal rule, which may again be explicitly related to at least two parts of that three-pronged argument.

5.3 Paradigms and preeminence: the narrative logic of ideal rule

5.3.1 Conceptualising ideal rule

The idea that advice literature as well as biographical works communicated ideas of ideal rule has been widely repeated, but few scholars have endeavoured to qualify what exactly this conceptualisation of "ideal rule" entailed. The general impression one gets is that it was a conglomerate of virtues and qualities that were either delivered as maxims (especially in advice works), exemplified in anecdotal form, or rendered in poetic language. It is of course true that several such qualities that are positively ascribed to rulers reappear across a wide spectrum of textual forms, and that a recognisable set of ideal character traits emerges through them, many of which are shared amongst cultures of Eurasia, but paradoxically, the more we try to pin these traits down, the more elusive the general concept of "ideal rule" becomes.[101]

P.M. Holt has called the virtues section in Bahāʾ al-Dīn b. Shaddād's *sīra* of Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn a "mirror for princes given specific personal application" and has compared its contents to those found in some of the later Mamluk *sīra*'s studied here, noting that Baybars especially is presented by Ibn ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir "as displaying the primitive virtues honoured among the Arabs [...], the qualities of a pious Muslim, and the characteristics of a good ruler — notably generosity and courage, orthodox belief and devotion to the holy war, exemplary justice and magnanimity".[102] At the same time, he is presented as "a paragon of the Mamluk virtues, who models himself on the *ustādh* [master], and assists his *khushdāshiyya* ['comradeship' among mamluks in the same household] in times of hardship and prosperity alike". Only after his ascension is he portrayed "as ideal sultan".[103]

Similarly, Anne Troadec summarised the image of an ideal Muslim ruler as emerging from accounts about the sultan's commendable religious practices, his physical perfection, and his moral qualities, i.e. justice, generosity, fair-mindedness.[104] These are indeed the familiar qualities usually associated with ideal rule, but as Holt already suggested, these were always accommodated to the specific life and deeds of the sultan whose life is exemplified in the *sīra.* Holt read the information contained within the

[101] On a general overview of Eurasian "shared worldviews" addressing the position of rulers in relation to society, see Duindam, "Prince, Pen, and Sword: Eurasian Perspectives", 545-548.
[102] Holt, "The sultan as ideal ruler", 124.
[103] Idem, 131.
[104] Troadec, *Les mamelouks dans l'espace syrien,* 232-234.

virtues sections and that found in the more general annalistic accounts continuously as part of a broader argument made by the authors about the ways in which a sultan performed a specific iteration of the ideal ruler. It is however worthwhile to distinguish between the literary practices of anecdotal exemplification in specific subsections and those found in larger narratives. It will be my suggestion that while the first instances may be said to have the communication of "ideal rule" as their primary objective, the instances found in the annalistic narrative use such terminology not to exemplify but in the first place to associate and to widen the networks of historical meaning generated by the text. Example of these last occurrences will be dealt with in 5.3.2. and 5.3.3.

The abstract virtues found in praise prose, poetry, or even in epistolary sections take those last goals even further: the malleable amorphousness of their appearances here seems to have been informed at least as much by the rhyming, metrical, and harmonious needs of literary discourse, as by the directly communicative function of the contents. The actual meanings of some of the terminology usually read as communicating propagandistic images of ideal rule are often in fact very difficult to pin down. How much should we make, for example, of appearances of such terms as "*ṣāḥib qirān", "pahlawān īrān",* and *"iskandar al-zamān"* beyond the fact that they created a number of wide-ranging literary associations?[105] *Ṣāḥib qirān* would in later centuries grow out to be a concept of major significance for the self-representation of rulers, but it does not seem to have signified something very specific to our authors,[106] and the use of a phrase like *pahlawān īrān* ("the Hero of Iran") is clearly related more to heroic literature than to an actual claim to any Iranian connection. The meanings attached to such a title as *Iskandar al-zamān* have on the other hand been analysed in detail by Anne-Marie Eddé in the case of Baybars, and by François de Polignac for al-Ashraf Khalīl.[107] Eddé's major argument is in line with the typical interpretation of legitimisation, as she claims that

> la titulature d'un souverain, qu'elle fût inscrite sur les monuments ou les objets, en tête de sa correspondance ou des documents officiels, est un excellent miroir de sa propagande politique. Le choix des titres et des épithètes reflétait, en effet, les vertus ou les actions qu'il souhaitait mettre en valeur.[108]

[105] Arabe 1705: 100r; *Alṭāf,* 5, 67.
[106] See for a discussion of how this phrase would become crucial for Timurid and Mughal rulerly self-representation: Azfar Moin, *The Millenial Sovereign.*
[107] F. de Polignac, "Un « nouvel Alexandre » mamelouk, al-Malik al-Ashraf Khalîl et le regain eschatologique du XIIIe siècle", *Revue des mondes musulmans et de la Mediterranée,* 89-90 (2000), 73-87.
[108] Eddé, "Baybars et son double", §8.

As I have argued before, this type of argument too strongly stresses the actions of the sultan himself, while leaving the role of those who formulated these types of discourses rather unclear. I have also discussed elsewhere that discourses of ideal rule often did not only serve to portray the ruler as a virtuous paragon, but were consciously used by authors to make a point about how one should rule, especially as it related to the ruler's advisors.[109] Ideal rule as such is not only praise but also advice, and is furthermore fundamentally negotiated through the exigencies of literary form.

Yet, as noted, there is a shared cluster of characteristics which may be identified as what "ideal rule" meant for authors. One formal way to try defining the fundamental reappearing virtues is by looking at those text which contain specific virtues sections. In the case of *al-Rawḍ al-zāhir* the first of these virtues are specifically named in short titles and adhere in general terms with those noted by P.M. Holt for Ibn Shaddād's *sīra* of Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn — I have copied them below and given only a very basic translation — but these titles become more general later in the section, at which point their contents bleed into the general annalistic narrative of the sultan's reign. In *al-Faḍl al-maʾthūr*, these sections are not as clearly signposted, but near the end of the *sīra* a number of consecutive short sections may be seen as exemplifying specific virtuous behaviour. The titles are more ambiguous here, so I have summarised the contents of these sections. A third set of virtues once more deals with Baybars and is found in the concluding section of ʿIzz al-Dīn b. Shaddād's *Tārīkh al-Malik al-Zāhir*, where he systematically lists fourteen sections on various qualities of the sultan.

al-Rawḍ al-zāhir	*al-Faḍl al-maʾthūr*	*Dhikr mā jazhaw ʿalā zahar al-khamīla min jumal sīrati-hi l-jamīla*
shujāʿa (bravery)	Building of *bīmāristān* and *madrasa*	1. Wondrous and remarkable things
ʿufw / ḥilm (clemency)	Alleviation of taxes	2. Love for jurists and sufi's / modestness
karam / ʿaṭāʾ (generosity)	Kind treatment of farmers	3. Justice (*ʿadl*) and being led by the *sharīʿa*
ʿadl (justice)	Adherence to *sharīʿa* and reliance on *ʿulamāʾ* in cases of capital punishment	4. Clemency (*ʿufw*) and forgiveness (*ṣafḥ*)
inṣāf (equity)	No indulgence in hunt and living quarters	5. Faithfulness (*wafāʾ*) to equals and subordinates
ḥusn al-muʿamala (good social intercourse)	Digging of Alexandria canal	6. Talents (*mawāhib*) and presents (*ʿaṭāyā*)

[109] G. Van Den Bossche, "Narrative Construction, Ideal Rule, and Emotional Discourse in the Biographies of Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn and Louis IX by Bahāʾ al-Dīn b. Shaddād and Jean Sire de Joinville", *al-Masaq* 30/2 (2018), 133-147.

ḥusn al-wafāʾ (faithfulness)		7. Pious deeds (*afʿāl al-birr*)
good expenditure		8. Prestige (*hayba*) and revered position (*manzila min al-qulūb*)
iqāma li-ḥurma l-sharīʿa (adherence to Islamic law)		9. Determination (*ʿazm*) and judiciousness (*ḥazm*)
iḥsān ilā man khadama-hu (favour to who served him)		10. Endurance in fighting (*muṣābara li-l-ḥarb*) and pursuit of it (*mubāshara*)
Great men who came to congratulate the sultan's ascension		11. Conquered cities and castles
Building activities during his reign (endowments, fleet, citadels)		12. Lands he ruled (*fī yadi-hi*)
Victory over those who had ill will towards him (essentially a rather lengthy account of a disloyal amir at the outset of Baybars' reign) + a short paragraph on various deeds		13. Who came to him (*man wafada ʿalay-hi*) (amirs and other important persons who came into the sultan's obedience)
		14. His buildings and endowments

Table 2: topics of ideal rule

There is some overlap here, but it is also clear that "virtue" is a flexible category under which we may file various qualities and deeds. Only two elements are common to all three texts: justice and reliance on the *sharīʿa* which I have here taken together, and building activities. Clemency (*ʿufw / ḥilm*) appears in two of the three texts, as do financial management and faithfulness (*wafāʾ*). The remainder of the categories are not unfamiliar to the other texts but are not explicitly named or categorised as virtues or are defined quite differently.

Similarly, when we read those parts of the surviving introductions that deal with ideal rule, we come away with a broad and flexible set of virtues. Qalāwūn is for example described by Shāfiʿ as "magnanimous", "blessed with justice and beneficence", "generous", and being a great horseman — which in fact broadens the palette of virtues he devoted specific attention to as rendered in the table above. In *Ḥusn al-manāqib* on the other hand, Baybars is almost exclusively praised in a relatively lengthy section as a martial ruler, whose greatest achievements are conquering Frankish lands and fighting off the Mongols. Ibn ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir's portrayal of Baybars in the surviving part of his introduction — much of what presumably dealt with ideal rule has not been preserved due to a tear in the British Library manuscript — similarly stresses martial activities, although he also brings justice (*ʿadl*) in the picture.

It is as such difficult to really qualify what may be understood as ideal rule, even though many aspects are familiar enough and may be read as representing such an

image through common sense logic. The problem is however that if no such aspects can be readily identified as immediately concomitant to a concept of ideal rule, it becomes a rather open and almost meaningless container. Indeed, even the aspects written about here by all three authors are malleable and represented by quite differing anecdotes. Terms such as *ʿadl, iḥsān, faḍl,* and so on functioned in an open-ended semantic logic that authors grasped to formulate in a logic of literary communication. It is perhaps best to conceptualise ideal rule in such a sense then, as an engagement with fluid paradigms of rulership in ever changing contexts. Similarly, the Arabic terms used to denote virtues and merits, which also appear in some of the titles of our *sīra*'s, should not be seen to have only one fixed meaning but clustered around a core meaning of exemplariness. Their being embedded in the context of a *sīra* automatically frames these discrete exempla as historical material, and as such I will turn in the remainder of this discussion to the application of such concepts of ideal rule to specific historiographical concerns.

5.3.2 Paradigms: Historicisation

Anne Troadec has argued that by writing history our authors and others like them constructed a historical vision in which "the past" was instrumentalised "to serve the present" ("le passé au service du présent").[110] They did so by making claims about the greatness of a sultan by comparing them to illustrious rulers of the past. Troadec used this conceptualisation mostly within her broader legitimisation argument, but the idea is in fact more broadly applicable to authorial agency and the interactive process of writing history. Konrad Hirschler has defined such processes as "historicisation", arguing that this was an important mode of emplotment as authors in doing so placed "[their] protagonists into specific historical continuities or discontinuities [which] evoked particular associations among audiences".[111] This type of evaluation had in fact been introduced in studies of western medieval historiography and narrative much earlier, most prominently by Gabrielle M. Spiegel, whose *Romancing the Past* has been an important indirect influence on this dissertation, although her work also evaluated historical writing strongly from the vantage point of aristocratic ideology of which authors are more or less seen as executing servants.[112] Yet, Spiegel's work does contain

[110] Troadec, "Les Mamelouks dans l'espace syrien", 82-84.
[111] Hirschler, *Medieval Arabic Historiography*, 77.
[112] She argues, for example, that "both history *and* prose performed critical social functions in the life of the French aristocracy, which sought to embed its ideology in history and thereby endow that ideology with the prestige and imprescribible character that the past was able to confer in medieval society", G.M. Spiegel,

many rewarding insights concerning meaningful historiographic re-uses of the distant past, so I will refer to it below to make sense of our authors' historical endeavour.

As far as the texts of our corpus go, the historicisation found in Ibn ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir's *sīra* of Baybars has received by far the most attention. Among others, Denise Aigle, Anne-Marie Eddé, and Anne Troadec have highlighted how the author presented the actions of Baybars as a re-enactment of legendary exploits by early Islamic or even pre-Islamic rulers or conquerors. It is true that in many instances Baybars is compared to earlier rulers and mythical figures, among others the pre-Islamic rulers Solomon[113] and Alexander,[114] the caliph ʿUmar b. al-Khaṭṭāb,[115] the sultan Saladin,[116] and even the Prophet Muḥammad. The latter's influence is especially clear from several instances in which Baybars is said to have acted according to *ḥadīth* sayings or where Ibn ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir inserts such sayings into the narrative to comment upon one of the sultan's actions.[117] While most such references are relatively isolated instances in the *sīra,* and can often be understood easily due to contingent associations (i.e. the comparisons to Alexander in contexts dealing with Alexandria), there are also more extended comparisons. The best example is that with Sayf al-Dawla in the last part of the text, in which the association with al-Mutanabbī and the quoting of his poetry was essential for the narrative and to which I will return in detail in 6.2.2.

Poetry is in fact one of the areas in which historicisations become especially prominent in the form of laudatory comparisons. Ibn ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir's other texts are in general much less explicitly historicising than *al-Rawḍ al-zāhir*, but in the poetry contained within them we do find material that refers regularly to earlier times. One example is a short four-line poem in *Tashrīf al-ayyām* near the end of an account about the sultan's activities in Syria, among which was the building of a mausoleum ("*qubba*") in al-Raḥba on the frontier with the Mongols. The poem celebrating this building is replete with historicising references:

شيّدت للملك كل قصر　　يُربى اعتلاء على البرابى
فصرح بلقيس في إنقضاض　　وصرح هامان في إنقضاب

Romancing the Past: The Rise of Vernacular Prose Historiography in Thirteenth-Century France (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 2. Italics from the original.

[113] *Rawḍ,* 272. The sultan is also called the "Solomon of the age" (*Sulaymān al-zamān*) in a poem written by the amir Jamāl al-Dīn b. al-Imām al-Ḥājib, quoted by Ibn ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir in *Rawḍ,* 219.

[114] *Rawḍ*, 193, 448. The associations are both made in contexts that are linked to the city of Alexandria: the renewal of the Alexandarian canal in 662 / 1263-4, and the repair of the lighthouse in 673 / 1275.

[115] *Rawḍ*, 325.

[116] *Rawḍ*, 120, 474. See also *Tashrīf,* 179.

[117] *Rawḍ,* 200-201, 222, 227, 231-232, 239, 275-276, 282, 287, 293, 301-302.

وشِعب بَوّان في أنقلاب وقصر غُمدان في إنقلاء[118]
يا حسنها قبة تعالت حتى تناهب إلى السحاب

Every castle is erected for kingship
to make it grow ascending above ancient temples
As Bilqīs in swooping down
and Hāmān in darting down would manifest
As Ghumdān castle in being derooted
and Shiʿb Bawwān in being overthrown
Oh how the *qubba* raises its excellence
until it vies with the clouds[119]

The gist of the poem is of course that the newly erected mausoleum excels earlier buildings, a commonplace in poetry. But the web of associations in fact frames the building in terms that suggest a victory of Islam over pre-Islamic polytheism: reference is made to ancient Egyptian temples (*barābā*), to the pre-Islamic Arabian ruler Bilqīs (the Queen of Sheba),[120] the ancient Egyptian pharaonic minister Hāmān,[121] a pre-Islamic Himyarite palace in present-day Sanaa that loomed large in Arabic poetic imagination,[122] and an Iranian valley that was often equated with "one of the four Earthly Paradises".[123] While one may object that much of this material is mythical rather than strictly historical, for Ibn ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir this arguably made no difference and even if he distinguished between these domains to some degree, the historical and mythical comparisons served the same end, equating the sultan to the heroes of Islam who confronted or engaged with these earlier powerful persons or institutions, and shows off Ibn ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir's broad historical knowledge.

The most obvious historicisation in Ibn ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir's *sīra* of Baybars — but one found less often in the other *sīra*'s — can be found in a number of relatively extensive historical digressions, such as, for example, about three manuscript folio's detailing the founding of the Azhar Mosque and its subsequent history immediately following a short account of about one folio about the Friday prayer at that mosque in the year 665 / 1266

[118] Reading this as *inqilāʿ* إنقلاع as I have only been able to locate an entirely unrelated Persian meaning for the word as written (the manuscript has the same spelling).
[119] *Tashrīf,* 140.
[120] J. Lassner, "Bilqīs", in *EQ,* vol. 1:228-229.
[121] A. Hearle Johns, "Hāmān", in *EQ,* vol. 2:399.
[122] See for example a reference to it by Shihāb al-Dīn Maḥmūd al-Ḥalabī in this line from a poem sent to ʿAlāʾ al-Dīn b. ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir in praise of his garden:
حلو المعانى كلفظ مِنشئهِ يقصُر عنه في الوصف غمدان
al-Ṣafadī, *al-Wāfī bi-l-wafayyāt,* 12:38.
[123] J.A. Boyle, "Dynastic and Political History of the Īl-Khāns", in *The Cambridge History of Iran, vol. 5: The Saljuq and Mongol Periods,* ed. J.A. Boyle (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1968), 309.

on the occasion of the mosque receiving a new endowment (*waqf*) from an amir.[124] A similar type of historicisation repeatedly undertaken by Ibn ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir is an overview of a conquered city or castle's preceding history, sometimes augmented by more broadly geographical information, at the end (more rarely at the start) of an account of its conquest. He does so for Caesarea, Jaffa, Shaqīf Arnūn, Tripoli (which was not actually conquered by Baybars, he only undertook some raids on its hinterland), Antioch, Baghrās, Balāṭunus, a number of Ismāʿīlī castles, Ḥisn al-akrād (Crac des Chevaliers), Ḥisn ʿAkkār, Ḥisn al-Kaff, Kaynūk, and a number of Cilician castles in *al-Rawḍ al-zāhir.*[125] By comparison, he only does so once in *Tashrīf al-ayyām,* in which the account of Qalāwūn's conquest of the castle of Marqab, which had already been the occasion for quoting a good deal of occasional poetry and a piece of *inshāʾ* writing, also includes accounts of the castle's history up to that point.[126] Ibn ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir's digressions are usually introduced as information gained from other historians (in rare cases attributed to earlier historians such as al-Balādhurī and Ibn Munqidh),[127] from books (*dhukira fī l-kutub*), or as authorial interventions by way of the phrase "the author of the *sīra* says" (*qāla muʾallif al-sīra*). One can see the logic of *adab* compilations in these digressions, as an author showing off his broad knowledge and entertaining his reader by giving information related in broad terms to the book's general topic.[128]

Ibn ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir's authorial process of historicisation is nicely encapsulated with the following excerpt from the *sīra* of Baybars found at the end of the account of the sultan's death — and thus at the end of the *sīra*:

> وكان مدة مرضه – قدس الله روحه – ثلاثة عشر يومًا وهي مدة مرض الشهيد صلاح الدين – رحمه الله تعالى. وأول ما فتحه السلطان بنفسه قيسارية وآخر ما فتحه قيسارية، وأول جلوسه مرتبة السلطنة يوم الجمعة سابع عشر ذي القعدة وآخر جلوسه في تخت السلطنة آل سلجوق بقيسارية الروم الجمعة سابع عشر ذي القعدة، وأوم من بنى أنطاكية – على ما تقدم ذكره – إسمه بالعربية الملك الظاهروآخر من ملكها وأخربها هذا الملك الظاهر، وكان القائم بدولة التركية السلجوقية السلطان ركن الدين طغرلبك وهذا

[124] *Rawḍ,* 277-280.

[125] *Rawḍ,* 232-233, 294-295, 295-296, 301-304, 313-323, 326-327, 348-349, 365-370 (in fact a fairly extensive history of the Ismāʿīlī sect), 377-378, 382, 413, 417-418, 438-440, 443-445 (more interwoven with the narrative than in the other accounts). Not every conquest receives such a treatment, no such information is given for the early conquests of Arsūf and Safad. Although that may suggest Ibn ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir only took up the practice later on, the fact that it is present for Baybars' earliest conquest of Caesarea gainsays that idea.

[126] *Tashrīf,* 85-87. The argument can be made that Qalāwūn simply conquered a good deal less than his predecessor. Furthermore, his most major conquest of Tripoli near the end of his life is not dealt with at all in this *sīra,* as are most of the later events of this sultan's life. The surviving part of *Alṭāf* only deals with one of al-Ashraf Khalīl's conquests, the castle of al-Ṣubayba (about which, see more below in 5.4), which does not include such a historicisation but does include a *taqlīd* bequeathing the castle to the viceroy Baydara.

[127] *Rawḍ,* 316, 377.

[128] About the literary uses of digression, see, among others: Rowson, "An Alexandrian Age", 107-109; Weintritt, *Formen spätmittelalterlicher islamischer Geschichtsdarstellung,* 87-92 (and 92-101 for examples).

السلطان ركن الدين هو الذي أقام الدولة التركية من حين المنصورة، وركن الدين ذاك هو الذي رد الخلافة لبني العباس نوبة البساسيرى وركن الدين هذا رد الخلافة لبني العباس – رضي الله عنهم – بإقامة الخليفين وهما المستنصر والإمام الحاكم بأمر الله أمير المؤمنين، والخطبة لهذا الظاهر بعد الحاكم أمير المؤمنين. و هذا من عجيب الإتفاق.

The length of his sickness — may God hallow his soul — was thirteen days, and this is [equal to] the length of the martyr Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn's sickness — may God have mercy on him. The sultan's first conquest was Caesarea [in Palestine] and his last conquest was [also named] Caesarea [Kayseri in Anatolia]; his first sitting on the seat of the sultanate was on Friday the 17th of Dhī al-Qaʿda, and his last sitting on the throne of the sultanate of the Saljuqs in Kayseri (*Qaysariyya l-Rūm*) was [also] on Friday the 17th of Dhī al-Qaʿda; the Arabic name of the first who built Antioch — as has been reported above — was "al-Malik al-Ẓāhir" (i.e. the resplendent king),[129] and the last who took it into his possession and devastated it was this al-Malik al-Ẓāhir [Baybars]; the one who established the Turkish Saljuq *dawla* was sultan Rukn al-Dīn Tughrilbek [d. 455 / 1063] and this sultan Rukn al-Dīn elevated the Turkish *dawla* at the time of [the Battle of] Manṣūra; that Rukn al-Dīn restored the caliphate to the Abbasids in the time of al-Basāsīrī [d. 451 / 1060], and this Rukn al-Dīn restored the caliphate to the Abbasids — may God be pleased with them — by appointing the two caliphs, and they are al-Mustanṣir, and the imam al-Ḥākim bi-Amr Allāh, the commander of the believers; and the *khuṭba* in the Egyptian [Fatimid] *dawla* was [delivered in the name of] al-Ẓāhir [d. 427 / 1036] after al-Ḥākim [d. 411 / 1021] the commander of the faithful, [as was] the *khuṭba* for this al-Ẓāhir after al-Ḥākim the commander of the faithful. And this is among the wonders of coincidence (*min ʿajāʾib al-ittifāq*).[130]

Ibn ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir had a keen eye for such "coincidences" of names and dates, as he records several others throughout the text. Of course, he was not unique in doing so, for such "*ajāʿib*" are widely attested. A. Azfar Moin has recently even argued that such remarks should not merely be seen as "aesthetic activity or literary exercise" but "as a widely sanctioned 'practical' activity operating in a realm of the concrete, that is, not only via words but also through actions and objects". He also talks of "a busy traffic in omens that structured quotidian life as well as crucial moments of war and politics".[131] While Ibn ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir's account here does not suggest Moin's "concrete activity", it does highlight the literary meanings the author attached to such coincidental

[129] The earlier report (*Rawḍ,* 313) names this king as "Asūkhsh" (no vocalisation, so this is a tentative reading), possibly a rendering of the name of its actual founder Seleucus I Nicator. The Greek name is presumably derived from "*ζάλευκος*" (*záleukos*, "very white")", https://en.wiktionary.org/wiki/Σέλευκος#Ancient_Greek
[130] *Rawḍ,* 474. Translation based on Khuwaytir, *Translation*, 875.
[131] Moin, *The Milennial Soverign*, 60-62.

conjunctions, which I believe also goes well beyond the aesthetic and the literary, considering the fact that such associations were also commonly used in epigraphy and epistolography. In fact, it is exactly because of their being more developed in historical works such as Ibn ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir's *sīra* that they gain in meaningfulness: they are not merely used as associations to showcase the author's broad knowledge and education, they are used to deepen the understanding of the recent past's importance by referral to similar events in a further past that had already withstood the forgetfulness of time. We may indeed read Ibn ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir's endeavour here as similar to how historians in thirteenth-century France wrote about contemporary events, as an effort, in Gabrielle Spiegel's words:

> to endow the discrete, concrete, and particular elements of contemporary reality with the same sense of moment and significance that medieval society normally accorded to an already valorized, traditional past.[132]

Ibn ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir's approach was informed by similar ideas, and it may even be added that by explicitly associating the contemporary or at least very recent events with persons and events of the distant past which had come down in books that had gained a prominent position in the Arabic textual tradition, he was trying to achieve a similar position for his own writing. Shāfiʿ on the other hand mostly used a different approach to valorise the recent past. He was clearly less inclined to dabble in long historical digressions, as his *sīra*'s generally do not include any. In *Ḥusn al-manāqib* he even excises the majority of this material from *al-Rawḍ al-zāhir*, putting the focus more fully on the literary endeavour of writing *sīra* and less on his uncle's historical inclinations. A striking example is how one of the more explicit and meaningful comparisons made between Baybars and Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn by Ibn ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir is introduced merely as a "story" ("*ḥikāya*") by Shāfiʿ who also excises its laudatory context.[133] There is one exception in *al-Faḍl al-maʾthūr* to Shāfiʿ's general lack of interest in historicisation when he gives some background about earlier Mongol incursions into Mamluk territory near the end of his account about the Battle of Homs — some form of which was a separate treatise before it was integrated into the *sīra,* as noted above.[134]

In fact, one could argue that whereas Ibn ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir had a focus on the relatively distant past as an opportunity to digressively break through the linear construction of

[132] Spiegel, *Romancing the Past*, 215. Spiegel speaks of a "task" to do so.
[133] *Ḥusn al-manāqib,* 99.
[134] *Faḍl,* 79-82. This historicising part is followed by two felicitation poems written by Fatḥ al-Dīn b. ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir and Shāfiʿ himself, comparable to Ibn ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir's historicisation and quoting of poetry on the occasion of the conquest of Marqab in *Tashrīf.*

his text and showcase his extensive historical knowledge, Shāfiʿ's inclination was towards the future — at least in the logic of the text's linearity, obviously the information he gives in these digressions are still to be situated in the past at the time of writing. As noted above, the most striking bits of digression found in *Ḥusn al-manāqib* are when Shāfiʿ details events that took place much later than the reign of Baybars, usually during the reigns of Qalāwūn and al-Ashraf Khalīl and in which he was involved himself. The difference between Ibn ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir and Shāfiʿ may thus be said that while the first valorised the recent past of Baybars' sultanate by explicitly linking it to the already meaningful distant past, Shāfiʿ in *Ḥusn al-manāqib* endowed this already quite distant past by highlighting historical continuities with the more recent past, by jumping ahead several years to show later developments. A good illustration of how this works is found when he details a raid of Baybars against Acre and adds (typically introducing it with the verb "*aqūl*", "I say"):

> لم يتهيأ للملك الظاهر فتح هذه عكا وأخرجها ليفرغ عن فتح ما هو أهم منها. ولما أفضت نوبة الملك للسلطان الملك المنصور رشيد الدين قلاوون الصالحي في سنة ثمان وسبعين وستمئة حضر رسل بيوت عكا وسألوا مهادنتهم على حكم هدنة الملك الظاهر. فأجيبوا و كتبت أنا هدنتها ولم تزل الهدنة مستمرة إلى سنة تسع وتسعين وستمئة.
>
> It was not possible for al-Malik al-Ẓāhir [Baybars] to conquer this Acre, and he left it to conclude the conquest of a more important [place]. When the rotation of kingship (*nawbat al-mulk*) settled on the sultan al-Malik al-Manṣūr Rashīd al-Dīn (sic!) Qalāwūn al-Ṣāliḥī in the year 678, messengers of the lords of Acre (*buyūt ʿAkkā*) came for an audience (*ḥaḍara*), and they asked for a truce according to the [earlier] ruling of the truce of al-Malik al-Ẓāhir. Their request was acceded and I wrote its truce which would remain in force until the year 699. [However,] it was invalidated.[135]

Shāfiʿ next goes on to detail the reasons for the invalidation, which have been discussed at length by P.M. Holt. Suffice it here to highlight this excerpt as an example of Shāfiʿ's flash-forward digressions, in which he also always clearly details his own role in the narrative – in this case by noting that he wrote the renewed truce himself.[136] This section is also concluded by quoting more or less the same lengthy felicitation poem for the conquest of Acre which Shāfiʿ quotes at the very end of *al-Faḍl al-maʾthūr*.[137] When discussing Baybars' raid against and further dealings with Tripoli, he similarly inserts a

[135] *Ḥusn,* 120.
[136] Holt, "Qalāwūn's Treaty", 330-333.
[137] In *Faḍl,* 181-183 the poem is 50 lines long; in *Ḥusn,* 122-127 the poem is 48 lines long.

flash-forward digression detailing at length Qalāwūn's dealings with and eventual conquest of the city.[138]

As has become clear, the forms of historicisation we have seen are most clearly visible in the two *sīra*'s of Baybars and much less so in the other *sīra*'s. It turns out that this type of explicit and extensive historicisation is only of limited value to fully understand the historico-literary undertaking of our authors in general, despite it having been by far the most dominant way of interpreting these texts in scholarly research so far. The following section will take the idea of historicisation a bit further by fully interpreting it as a literary communicative practice, and will show that in this form it is present in important ways in all texts.

5.3.3 Preeminence: the cyclical renewal of excellence

The above section has shown how our authors, and Ibn ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir especially, instrumentalised comparisons to historical persons to argue for their sultans' equally worthy position. There are however also a good deal of references where Ibn ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir takes such comparisons further, and presents a ruler who surpassed all other rulers. The claim to sultanic pre-eminence is of course a commonplace of panegyric literature, but it is used by our author in a variety of meaningful ways that are worth discussing in more detail. It is once again especially pronounced in the *sīra* of Baybars, but also to a lesser degree in his other *sīra*'s. Shāfiʿ for his part, does not make much use of such comparisons at all. The only reference I have come across which may be understood in a similar way is a short, unextended mention in a highly literary context.[139] This is thus again an important difference between our two authors, who clearly used history differently in their panegyrical constructions.

One example is an episode in *al-Rawḍ al-zāhir* where Baybars is presented as playing polo in Damascus while several carefully identified princes from Syria and the Jazīra attend him. The implication is of course that Baybars is not their equal but their overlord. Ibn ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir concludes that: "this is something no other king has witnessed". To further underline his claim, he even adds an anecdote about Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn taken from Ibn al-Athīr's (d. 630 / 1233) *al-Kāmil fī l-tārīkh*, in which the sultan was attended by "a man who was in his service (*fī khidmati-hi*) from the Saljūqs, and his garments were adjusted by a man from the household of the Atābeg". Upon seeing this

[138] *Ḥusn,* 271-276. See Holt, *Early Mamluk Diplomacy,* 58-68 for a translation of this episode, a translation of the variant episode given in *Faḍl,* as well as a translation of the truce which is quoted by Baybars al-Manṣūrī.
[139] *Arabe 1705*, 83v.

an unnamed bystander comments that Saladin should not fear death anymore because of this remarkable fact. Ibn ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir adds after this quote: "Where is this commenter so that he could see this sultan, while [all] these kings are serving him?"[140] The comparison is as such made explicit: if Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn was considered to be an excellent ruler because of such a situation, then surely the anecdote about Baybars' is even more impressive, and his achievement more noteworthy.

Another example in the same text is found when Ibn ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir describes a group of Mongols changing sides and seeking "security" in the Egyptian lands (*al-Tatār al-mustaʾminīn*), a recurring event in the text.[141] Here, an interesting pairing of statements takes place. The author first describes in highly laudatory language the reception of the Mongols:

> فركب السلطان لتلقيهم والملائكة به محيطة * والملة الإسلامية به محوطة * ولما قرب التتار وشاهدوا السلطان وهو كالبدر ليلة كماله * والأسد بين أشباله * نزلوا وقبلوا الأرض
>
> The Sultan rode out to meet them, while angels and kings surrounded him and as the Muslim religion was protected by him. When the Tatārs approached and saw the Sultan like the moon on the night of her fullness and a lion among its cubs, they dismounted and kissed the ground.[142]

This is immediately followed by a statement of our author (actually introduced by the phrase "the writer of the *sīra* said", *qāla kātib al-sīra*) comparing Baybars favourably to other kings:

> الواجب الدعاء لملك نصر الإسلام * وأعزه بعد الإهتمام * فإنه فرق بين ملك تقبل ملوك التتار الأرض بين يديه وهو راكب * وبين ملك كانت التتار تطلب منه حضور الحرم في المشارب * وبين ملك تهادنه ملوك الإسلام والكفر تطلب منه الرضى والعفوان * وملوك تهادي ملوك الكفر تطلب منهم الأمن والأمان * وبين ملك تسلم من الكفر البلاد والحصون * وبين ملوك سلموا للكفر من البلاد والقلاع والحرم والأولاد والأموال كل مصون *

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[140] *Rawḍ,* 120. In Ibn al-Athīr's version the attendants are identified as Muʿizz al-Dīn Qayṣar Shāh b. Qilij Arslān, the youngest son of the Seljuq ruler of Anatolia who actually fled to seek refuge with Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn because of inheritance disputes with his father and brothers, and ʿAlāʾ al-Dīn Khuramshāh b. ʿIzz al-Dīn, who as son of the lord of Mosul commanded its forces who were part of Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn's armies. Ibn al-Athīr, *al-Kāmil fī l-tārīkh,* ed. Muḥammad Yūsuf al-Daqāqa (Beirut: Dār al-kutub al-ʿilmiyya, 2003), vol. 10:212. Shāfiʿ paraphrases this episode taken from Ibn al-Athīr but mostly strips it of its comparative context. *Ḥusn al-manāqib,* 99.

[141] *Rawḍ,* 137, 194-195, 198, 203. On the nuptial importance of women descending from this group of Mongol, so-called *wāfidī* amirs, see Northrup, *From Slave to Sultan*, 116-118.

[142] *Rawḍ*, 178; Khuwaytir, *Translation,* 484 (very slightly altered).

> Supplication is necessary for a king who renders Islam victorious and fortifies it after oppression. For there is a difference between a king before whom Tatar kings kiss the ground while he is on horseback, and a king who was demanded by the the Tatars to bring his womenfolk to drinking assemblies; between a king with whom the kings of Islam make peace while infidelity seeks satisfaction and forgiveness from him, and kings who give presents to infidel kings in seeking peace and security; between a king who delivers territories and forts from infidelity, and kings who hand over all their well-guarded territories, forts, women, children, and properties.[143]

Baybars surely excels all these other rulers because he has Mongols submitting before him, whereas other rulers submit themselves to Mongols. Allusion is here of course made to those rulers, such as the Armenians of Cilicia, some of the Frankish principalities and even some Ayyūbid princes, who in the face of the Mongol onslaught, chose not to fight but to allow free passage to the Mongols or who after defeat collaborated with them.[144] Baybars explicitly reverses this trend and brings Mongol amirs into obedience and under *his* authority.

There are also more subtle contrasts where our author does not make the comparison explicitly, but where the point is made by a linear alignment of information, by which a comparison is implied. When describing the easy capture of the Templar fort of Baghrās, for example, our author notes that "it came into possession of Islam without effort," because the Templars had all fled, leaving only an old woman behind.[145] Following this, Ibn ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir quotes a popular poem written by al-Qāḍī l-Fāḍil, and then goes on to give some background history on the fort. Here he notes that al-Malik al-ʿAzīz Muḥammad (d. 634 / 1236), a grandson of Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn who ruled Aleppo, had not been able to conquer it despite besieging it for seven months. Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn himself, by contrast, did conquer it earlier, "without fighting".[146] While never explicitly comparing Baybars to either ruler, the comparison is evident: if al-Malik al-ʿAzīz was not a worthy successor of Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn, Baybars is, because he accomplishes similar feats, here exemplified by the reconquest of this fort.[147] This idea is only reinforced by the fact

[143] *Rawḍ*, 178-179; Khuwaytir, *Translation,* 484 (much more fundamentally altered).
[144] P.M. Cobb, *The Race for Paradise: An Islamic History of the Crusades* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 223.
[145] *Rawḍ,* 325-326. It is interesting to note that Shāfiʿ b. ʿAlī retains this last specific bit of information in *Ḥusn al-manāqib*, 278.
[146] *Rawḍ,* 327.
[147] As noted above in the polo episode, elsewhere Baybars actually excels Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn. Another very similar example is the contrasting of Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn's inability to conquer al-Quṣayr with Baybars's conquest of the same fort. *Rawḍ,* 443-445.

that Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn's son (and al-ʿAzīz Muḥammad's father) and Baybars share the regnal title al-Malik al-Ẓāhir.[148]

Such anecdotes are not as pervasive in Ibn ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir's other texts, but the topos of excellence can certainly be found at various points. In very similar fashion to his accounts in *al-Rawḍ al-zāhir,* Ibn ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir makes claims about the excellence of Qalāwūn's conquest of Marqab in *Tashrīf al-ayyām*: "[to conquer] it had been impossible for kings, none of whom were able to get near to it, much less besiege it. [...] God had preserved it for our lord the sultan so that it could be one of his brilliant conquests, and so that the most excellent *sīra* may be crowned by it".[149] Ibn ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir's first poem celebrating this conquest includes a line that communicates a similar idea:

حصن عظيم القدر في سيرة لمن مضى قبلك لم يكتب

[The conquest of] a castle of great extent which in a *sīra*
about who came before you has not been recorded[150]

It is interesting to note that in both these comments the sultan's achievement is directly linked to the composition of his *sīra,* which by necessity also excels other biographical writings. In fact, this last poem as a whole has a quite strong stress on the importance of writing and books to celebrate and solidify the sultan's achievement, and drives home the major point about the centrality of the *dīwān* made by our author at several other points in his texts.

Another example of excellence, but without the connotations of writing, is the account of Qalāwūn's building of a *qubba* in the Citadel of Karak, which is said to have become "a wonder among buildings, the like of which has not been built by a king in a kingdom among the kingdoms".[151] Such phrases may also be found in Ibn ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir's last text, *al-Alṭāf al-khafiyya* where al-Ashraf Khalīl is praised as follows at the outset of an account of the conquest of al-Ṣubayba (present-day Nimrod fortress) in the Golan:

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[148] A less elaborate example can be found in the description of the journey to Anatolia. When the crossing of the river Göksu is mentioned, and our author notes that this is the river "from which al-Malik al-Kāmil turned back in the year of the passes [...] We crossed it immediately, at high speed, and the horses hurried through it not knowing whether they were wading through waves of water or marching over dry land". Again, Baybars's actions excel those of the previous ruler. Khuwaytir, *Translation*, 852; *Rawḍ,* 457.

[149] *Tashrīf,* 77. See for another, but in my opinion incorrect, translation, Gabrieli, *Arab Historians of the Crusades,* 199.

وخبأه الله لمولانا السلطان ليكون من فتوحاته المنيرة * [...] لأنه كان قد أعجز الملوك ولم يقدر أحد منهم على التقرّب منه فكيف النزول عليه ولتطرّز به أحسن سيرة

[150] *Tashrīf,* 82.

[151] *Tashrīf,* 139: فجاءت من عجائب الأبنية التى ما عمّر مثلها ملك في مملكة من الممالك

ولما كان مولانا – السلطان خلّد الله سلطانه – قد جبله الله على مكارم الأخلاق * وشريف الشام وكريم الأعراق * وجمع له جمعه في سواه من الملوك من كرم بكل نوع من الأنواع * حتّى بالممالك والمدائن والحصون والقلاع *

Since our lord the sultan — may God perpetuate his might — was moulded by God in accordance with the traits of noble character, and with distinguished personality and noble parentage; all kinds of noble nature had been combined for him such as had not been combined for any king like him, even in [the conquering of] kingdoms, cities, forts, and citadels.[152]

Similar but less extensive statements about al-Ashraf being without equal are made at three other points.[153]

This is thus an aspect typical of our author's writing that reappears in all his *sīra*'s, though in varying levels of prominence. It is clear from the contexts in which it appears in *Tashrīf al-ayyām* and in *al-Alṭāf al-khafiyya,* that the trope of sultanic excellence was understood as a literary one, i.e. functioning primarily within *sajʿ* and poetry registers. This is different from those instance in *al-Rawḍ al-zāhir* where it appears often in more straight-forward historiographical narrative where the comparisons were developed more extensively. Yet, even if the majority of such claims are made in literary, especially laudatory contexts, that does not mean they are meaningless. One could think that it is self-defeating that our author to use such phrases to describe several different sultans, but in the context of the constant renewal of a sultan's *dawla* it becomes quite powerful, as it argues for the ever growing support of fate of this larger Turkish *dawla,* a historiographical idea that probably gradually developed throughout our authors' careers. Furthermore, if we understand these uses of themes of excellence and of paradigms in the way Spiegel and Hirschler have, we can see our authors as continuously re-engaging with the distant past to interpret the recent past and endow it with meaning.

[152] *Alṭāf,* 29.
[153] *Alṭāf,* 24, 30, 37.

Conclusion

"Here is the past", wrote Virginia Woolf, and though she meant it ironically, our authors may be thought of as similarly stating, as it were: "here is the sultan, and here are his deeds". Their *sīra*'s were explicitly announced in their introductions as historical works preoccupied with presenting a picture of a ruler's life and reign. But at the same time, as we have seen, their argument had another side to it as well: they posited their own crucial, and indeed necessary role as the ones who make sense of that life and those deeds. Because of their privileged position they were the ones who could most meaningfully construct that narrative of a sultan's life as an exemplum of ideal rule. As such, they invite us to think about the ways in which they went about presenting that life, rather than take their version of the events for "truth". Earlier scholars have regularly noted that because of their panegyric proclivities we should always take our authors' words with a pinch of salt and interpret them within the workings of patronage and praise, but the above chapter has highlighted the important layer of authorial agency *within* the historical narrative itself. This was not merely a picture of the sultan and his life that stretched the possibilities of historical truth, it was also an illustration of the ways in which the authors had performed their own role as ideal *kuttāb,* and of how they continued to do so: the masterfully composed texts in which these narratives were embedded highlight the author's continuing claim to literary preeminence. Authors as such were creative composers, but they did so firmly within the logic of their professional background as scribes, and the following chapter will deal more closely with the practice of composing a *sīra* as an expression and performance of their scribal identity.

Chapter 6
The composition of *sīra*: discourse, registers and compilation

أصل الكتابة مشتق من الكَتبِ وهو الجمع، ومنه سُمّيَ الكتاب كتابًا، لأنه يجمع الحروف، وسُمّيت الكَتيبة كتيبة لأنها تجمع الجيش، وقد ورد في المعارف أن حروف المُعجم أُنزلت على آدم عليه السلام في إحدى عسرين صحيفة (...) فهذا إشتقاقها.

The root of writing is derived from al-katb *which means "gathering". As such a book is called* kitāb*, because it gathers letters [of the alphabet], and a military corps is called* katība*, because it gathers soldiers, and it is found in all sorts of knowledge [sources] that the letters of the alphabet were sent down to Adam (peace be upon him) on twenty-one pages* [...] *This is its etymology*.[1]

To write is "to gather", writes al-Nuwayrī, and in a way we may see him anticipating Paul Ricoeur's definition of "emplotment" as a "grasp[ing] together" of "multiple and scattered events, thereby schematizing the intelligible signification attached to the narrative taken as a whole".[2] Although al-Nuwayrī's etymological defitinion is limited to the gathering of letters of the alphabet as a basic prerequisite for the act of writing, we can also stretch his comment beyond its direct meaning – presumably not too far removed from the author's own interpretation – and connect this "gathering" to stylistic and compilatory considerations. Simply gathering alphabetical letters into

[1] Al-Nuwayrī, *Nihāyat al-arab,* vol. 7:3.
[2] Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative, vol. 1:* ix-x; *Temps et récit,* 10. "[L'intrigue d'un récit] <<prend ensemble>> et intègre dans une histoire entière et complète les événements multiples et dispersés et ainsi schématise la signification intelligible qui s'attache au récit pris comme un tout."

words and sentences will not automatically lead to a *kitāb* ("book"), despite the word's direct link to *al-katb,* as that may just as well end up in nonsense, gibberish, or, God forbid, bad poetry; to attain this more advanced stage of "writing" one needs the talent or at least the education to gather letters into meaningful wholes, one needs to be familiar with the rules of eloquent composition to craft worthwhile sentences and texts. In fact, the quote does not appear randomly in al-Nuwayrī's vast encyclopaedia, but is found at the outset of his discussion of the importance of *kuttāb* (notice that this word, too, is derived from *k-t-b*) in the final (fourteenth) and massive subchapter of his "chapter" about what and whom a ruler should rely on. Al-Nuwayrī's observation thus draws attention not just to the practical side of writing, but also to its political importance, implying as it were that it is the *kuttāb* who assist the sultan in gathering the necessary linguistic prerequisites for his claim to power.[3]

I have used al-Nuwayrī's quote as an introduction to how I would like to think about the composition of *sīra* in this last analytical chapter beyond the conceptualisations, narrative structures, and historical paradigms discussed above. It has been my contention that we should understand *sīra* as written by Ibn ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir and Shāfiʿ b. ʿAlī in large part as a genre that functioned within the linguistic, stylistic, and even topical idioms commonly used in the *dīwān al-inshāʾ.* This section will deal with how this is effectively visible in the *sīra*'s, and how the texts themselves should be seen as performative displays of the author's abilities in language, especially *inshāʾ* -- which, it will be remembered, is commonly translated as "composition". I will argue that the composition of *sīra* for our authors may be seen as an act of "gathering" on two related levels. A first (6.1.) is a gathering on a discursive level, especially as an exercise in adequate registers by which the *kātib* gathers examples of his mastery of language in all its aspects and performs his extensive knowledge and abilities, and as a way to showcase his creative linguistic flexibility; it will also be shown to have been present as a distinguishing discourse on the secret and the confidential as the *kātib*'s domain of excellence. A second level (6.2.) understands gathering in a more literal sense and zooms in on practices of compilation of *inshāʾ* writings and poetry. Both these larger practices of "gathering" will be explored in general ways and through a number of more detailed case studies.

[3] It is immediately followed by verses from the *Qurʾān* about the meanings of "writing", which already highlights the prime importance al-Nuwayrī accorded to this practice.

6.1 Discourse

Language and writing style were crucial preoccupations of our authors, and showing one's command of various stylistic registers may thus be understood as an important avenue of linguistic performance. I understand register within a sociolinguistic definition of "a social genre of linguistic usage", intimately related to a "field", that is a "social setting and purpose of the [linguistic] interaction", which can be understood within Pierre Bourdieu's definition of the field. In sociolinguistics, "style refers to variations within registers that can represent individual choices along social dimensions".[4] As my understanding of discourse is also fundamentally linguistic, register and style may be said to refer to partly overlapping *modes* of discourse, specifically chosen by agents within a field and referring to or making use of discrete elements of that field's habitus, for specific communicative ends. Yet, we have also seen that discourse is more than just language and has important performative goals: it will be my contention that masterfully employing specific stylistic registers and formulating specific argumentative discourses were avenues for our authors to perform their claims to having been exemplary *kuttāb*. Mastering these registers required a great amount of effort due to their inherent complexity, and successfully applying it in texts may thus be seen as agents performing their mastery and belonging to a limited group of people endowed with knowledge of these registers, who could understand and appreciate the full, often ambiguous complexity of their writings.

6.1.1 Discourse as language: Stylistic registers

The predominant stylistic used by our authors and the social groups to which they belonged, is *sajʿ*, the rhyming cadenced prose which we have by now come across several times in quoted excerpts. While the amount of this stylistic per text varies, it has a strong presence in each one of them. Shāfiʿ's two main texts, *al-Faḍl al-maʾthūr* and his *sīra* of al-Nāṣir Muḥammad, are written predominantly in *sajʿ*, as is Ibn ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir's *al-Alṭāf al-khafiyya.* In general, Shāfiʿ veers more towards sustained rhymed prose, while Ibn ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir in most of his texts shows a more balanced approach between straightforward language and rhetorically inclined *sajʿ*.

[4] P. Stockwell, *Sociolinguistics: A Resource Book for Students* (London-New York: Routledge, 2002), 6-8.

Neither of our authors explicitly explains these choices of register, but it is clear from their introductions and from the body texts themselves that the writing of a *sīra* was almost by necessity linked to an appropriately elevated register. As Shāfiʿ writes in *Ḥusn al-manāqib,* his "eloquent" uncle (*al-balīgh*) "captured [the sultan's] days with the composition (*naẓm*) of a *sīra* in which he eloquently constructed (*rattala*) chapters on his good qualities".[5] The stress on eloquence and balanced and cohesive composition (*naẓm*) is clear here, and considering the fact that good *sajʿ* was widely seen as the most appropriate way of writing eloquent prose, it follows that *sīra* itself must be written at least in part in this register. Ibn ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir himself claims that writing a *sīra* is a necessity for him, but the specific ways in which that writing should materialise are only implicitly suggested by way of the register. As we have seen, Shāfiʿ's other introduction in *al-Faḍl* also greatly stresses the importance of "writing" implied by a *sīra* in itself, but it is only implicitly clear what form the writing should take. Remarks throughout the texts sometimes highlight the importance of register, such as a praise of the sultan by Ibn ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir in a *taqlīd* already dense with references to pens and books included in *al-Alṭāf al-khafiyya,* which claims that "the herd is under the mild preservation of his shelter, and the doves of the pens and the signs are writing rhymed prose in praise of him".[6] *Sajʿ* is thus at least in part associated with praise, and considering the consistently laudatory tone of all the *sīra*'s our authors wrote, it follows that they too should be written in this language register.

The stylistic registers are sometimes even visually stressed. Poetry especially is clearly recognisable, as its metrical stress usually makes for uniform blocks of text which do not fill out the page.[7] *Sajʿ* on the other hand is not consistently visually stressed. One of the simplest ways of doing so is to outline the cola's, with the end rhyme situated at the end of a line. Elsewhere, the text will use spaces as dividers between words to highlight the rhythmical pause between cola's. The more lavishly executed manuscripts, such as those of Ibn ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir's *Tashrīf al-ayyām* and *al-Alṭāf al-khafiyya,* highlighted this rhyme by situating circular, floral or solar decorative elements immediately following the rhyming words, but not always consistently so. The two pages reproduced in 5.2.4. as well as the "literary" heading reproduced from the manuscript from *al-Alṭāf* in 5.2.5. have these decorative elements too, though in the first example they are not used to stress rhyme but to draw attention to discourse signposting the start of the important correspondence included in the text. The fact that these decorative elements were used to highlight the language register as well as

[5] *Ḥusn,* 56. See 4.2.2.2. for the context of this phrase.
[6] *Alṭāf,* 33. * والرعية في كنف صونه وادعة * وحمائم الأقلام والأعلام بالثناء عليه ساجعة
[7] For a discussion of various common layouts for poetry, see F.W. Daub, "Standards and Specifics: the Layout of Arabic Didactic Poems in Manuscripts", *Manuscript Cultures,* 5 (2012-2013), 52-67.

visually stress headings or specific material, suggests that the use of *sajʿ* was considered to be an important textual marker that should be made clear to readers.

Despite the visual stress on *sajʿ* and the importance of those parts of the text which were written in elevated registers, all the texts in our corpus in fact oscillate throughout between elaborately composed parts and comparably straightforward sections. Clearly, there were scales of rhetorical density which our authors exploited according to the message they wanted to convey. In the following pages I will devote some time to a case study in which such an oscillation is very clearly visible and in which we can formulate some conclusions about its goals. It is furthermore worthwhile to devote some attention to as it is taken from Shāfiʿ's *sīra* of al-Nāṣir Muḥammad which has not been studied before and which provides a rather unique perspective on the period's pacification of the Lebanese highlands in the early eight / fourteenth century.

6.1.1.1 A case study of registers: from laudation to a bawdy joke and back

The anecdote that will be studied deals with one of the Kisrawān expeditions against the various ambiguously defined groups who inhabited the Lebanese mountains, most likely that of 705/1305. These expeditions are rather badly understood because of a relative dearth of accounts, and the fact that the notorious contemporary hard-line scholar Ibn Taymiyya wrote a number of fatwa's in the context of these struggles, which have received ample attention, but which have at the same time somewhat distorted the evaluation of the historical information.[8] Shāfiʿ's idiosyncratic take on these struggles is thus an important addition to the field, but as always with our author, one must read his accounts from the perspective of a literary take on what Ricoeur calls the historiographical "act of reconfiguration" of disparate events in time. Considering the fact that the text remains unedited, it is worthwhile to quote this episode in full, though I will divide it into three parts and offer some comments in between. The episode starts out in a familiar highly laudatory register:

ذكر عضو فاسد عاجله مولانا السلطان بالقطع وحسم المادّة

من جملة رعايا المملكة الشامية قوم جبلية يقال لهم العشير قد اوٗو الى جبلٍ يعصمهم من ما[ء] السيوف برَغمهم * ويَسَموا بهم عن شُهُب السهام الأرضية المنقضية مما يقضى برَغمهم * وهاولا القوم اهل شقاق ونفاق * وسوء خلق واختلاق * وفساد عقائد * ورفض يجهرون به على رؤس الأشهاد * ويقطعون

[8] On the fatwa's see amongst others, Y. Friedman, "Ibn Taymiyya's Fatāwā against the Nuṣayrī-ʿAlawī Sect", *Der Islam* 82 (2005), 349-363. The most up to date treatment of the issues is found in S. Winter, *A History of the ʿAlawīs: From Medieval Aleppo to the Turkish Republic* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2016), 43-73 (esp. 56-61). I am grateful to Konrad Hirschler for notifying me of this publication.

الطريق على السالك * // ويوردون مَن أمّ مطلب هديهم المهالك * جبلهم قد جبلهم على قلة الدين * وغدا بإرتكابهم حجراً في طريق المسلمين * كم أيتموا من صغيرةٍ بقتل كبيرةٍ وكم كبيرة إرتكبوها * فقضت لهم بسو العُقبى والمصير وكم غارةٍ شنّوها * وسنة سبياتٍ سنّوها * ورتبة فاجرٍ من قوم سنّوها * متى فهموا تغيّراً في دولة طغوا في البلاد فأكثروا فيها الفساد * ويعرضوا الى من يظفرون به من العساكر المنصورة روايةً معنعنة الإسناد * لا يقفون عنا[...] شريعة *ولا يؤمّلون لسد دريعة *

A rotten limb which our lord the sultan rushed to cut off, severing [its] substance
Among the whole of the Syrian kingdom's flocks there is a mountain folk who are called the ʿAshīr, who had sought refuge on a mountain, which would protect them from the temper of the swords that were averse of them, * and [the mountains] made them rise too high for the shooting stars of the earthly arrows, which swooped down from where [those who] intended to bring them down [were located]. * And this folk is a people of discord and hypocrisy, * of bad creation and concoction, * of corrupted beliefs, * of nonacceptance [*rafḍ,* of the true Faith – i.e. Shiism] which they publicly proclaim for all the world to see. * And they were highway robbers, * bringing the one who went out to demand their tribute [to] a perilous path. * Their mountains moulded them to have little religion, * and they have come to a point where their perpetration of sins has become an obstruction on the road of the Muslims. * How many shall be orphaned among the young by the killing of grown-ups and how many great sins will they perpetrate? * A bad ending and destiny was determined for them; for how many attacks did they launch? * They established the habit of taking captives, * they introduced the rank of an immoral one among a people. * When they realised there was a change in a *dawla*, they terrorised the lands and increased corruption in it, * resisting the triumphant armies that would be victorious over them by way of a lesson with a trusted chain of transmitters, * not stopping to be lawfully obedient, * even if they hoped for an obstruction to [the] sharp arrows [which were shot in their direction].[9]

It is clear that the account is understood as an undertaking on par with the sultan's other major achievements. Yet it does not communicate much that is very specific: the ʿAshīr are said to be a mountain folk deviating from the Islamic norm. In other sources, ʿAshīr usually denotes a tribal confederation,[10] and other authors who mention the expedition of 705 / 1305 usually frame it as directed against Nuṣayrī's and/or Shiites, the latter of which our author in fact also alludes to by using the term *rafḍ*. Although the

[9] Arabe 1705, 54v-55r. For the last word, *darīʿa,* see Lane, *An Arabic-English Lexicon,* 872.
[10] Āmina Maḥmūd ʿAwda al-Dhiyābāt, *"al-Qabāʾil al-ʿarabiyya fī bilād al-Shām fī siyāsat al-Mamlūkiyya (658-784 AH)"* (Unpublished PhD dissertation, Muʾta University, 2006), 60-61. On the problem of identifying tribal groups in Egypt, see Y. Rapoport, "Invisible Peasants, Marauding Nomads: Taxation, Tribalism, and Rebellion in Mamluk Egypt", *MSR* 8/2 (2004), 1-22.

account is not dated in the *sīra,* it is followed by an account about events in Rabīʿ I (the third Islamic month) 705 / September-October 1305. In this year, Ibn al-Dawādārī has a short account of the Kisrawān expedition under the leadership of the Syrian viceroy Jamāl al-Dīn Āqūsh al-Afram, who is also named by Shāfiʿ (see below). Although the strictly historical information — as in, clearly discernible dates, events and facts — provided by Shāfiʿ's account is relatively limited, it is rich in discursive qualities and may be understood to communicate views about this group and the expedition that would be favourably received at court.

However, before Shāfiʿ further develops his rhetorical lambasting of the ʿAshīr, he inserts an anecdote in an entirely different register, what I have called a "bawdy joke" in the title of this subsection. Significantly, the anecdote is announced as a "story" (*ḥikāya*), so the break in register is as it were signposted:

حكى لي بعض الأجناد والعُهدة عليه، قال: قطعتُ من دمشق إقطاعاً بهذه الجبل فتوجهتُ لأراه ومعي منشوري، فلما
توسطتُ الجبل وجدت شاباً متزركشاً بكلوته فلما رآني نفر متسلقاً في الجبل كأنه عقاب فسألته وهو هارب عن الضيعة التي أقطعتُها فلما سمع إسمها وقف وقال ,,ما تبغي بها؟"
فقلت ,,قد أقطعتها بهذا المنشور"
فقال ,,هي بلدي وأبي فلاحك"
فقلت ,,قد حصل المقصود، إمشي قدامي اليها"
فقال ,,ما أقدر ادخلها"
فقلت ,,لأي شيء؟"
فقال ,,بيني وبين أبي خصومة شديدة وأنا غضبان"
فقلت ,,لأي شيء؟"
فقال ,,قصدتُ منه أن يزوّجني وأختي فإمتنع"
فقلت ,,هذا حلال عندكم؟"
فقال ,,نعم حلال طيب عندنا"
فقلت له ,,إمشي وأنا أشفع لك عنده"
فلما صرنا إلى بيته يلقاني بالرحب فقلت له: ,,هذا ولدك فلا ترد شفاعتي في أمره وزوّجه بأخته"
فقال ,,أنت تأمر ولكن كيف أزوّجها وهي حبلى مني في ثمانية أشهر؟"
قال لي هذا الجندي ,,فبت عنده ما أصبحت وحضرتُ الى دمشق ورميتُ المنشور وحكيتُ الحكاية لنائب السلطنة بها في ذلك الوقت وقلتُ والله لا كنتُ مقطع بلدٍ يتضارب ابو إمرأة وأخوها على زواجها."
هذا صورة ما حكي وهي أقل مناحسهم.

A soldier told me [the following], and the responsibility is his. He said: "I received an *iqtāʿ* from Damascus in these mountains, and I set out to inspect it with my edict. When I was in the middle of the mountains I found a young man wearing an

embroidered *kalawta*When he saw me he ran away ascending the mountains as [11]. if he were an eagle, and while he was running away I asked him about the village which I had received as an *iqtāʿ* and when he heard its name he stopped and asked: 'What do you want from it?'
I said: 'I received it as an *iqtāʿ* with this edict.'
He said: 'It is my village and my father is your farmer.'
I said: 'My goal has been attained, walk in front of me to [the village].'
He said: 'I am not in a position to enter it.'
'Why?'
'Between me and my father there is an intense quarrel and I am angry with him.'
'Why?'
'I had in mind for him to marry me off to my sister and he forbade it.'
'Is this allowed among you?'
'Yes, it is allowed [and even seen as] good among us.'
'Walk in front of me and I will mediate for you with him.'
When we called out to [the father's] house he received me generously and I said to him: 'This is your son and you will not resist my mediation in his case of his wanting to marry his sister.'
And [the father] said: 'You [may] command [whatever you want] but how could I marry her off while she is [already] eight months pregnant of me?'"
The soldier told me this: "I settled with him what became clear and I returned to Damascus where I threw down the edict and told the story to the governor at the time and I said: "by God, I would not be an *iqtāʿ* holder of a village where a father of a woman and her brother fight over marrying her!" This is the way he told me [this story], and it is the least of their impunities.[12]

This may come across as a highly remarkable and very atypical anecdote for Shāfiʿ b. ʿAlī who is mostly known for writing the type of demanding prose found in the excerpt above, but at least its register is not unprecedented. Shāfiʿ's other *sīra*'s contain a number of flash forward digressions in which the author discusses later events and in which he changes registers to a conversational tone, including quite a bit of direct speech, sometimes even including colloquialisms, as in this excerpt.[13] It is of course remarkable to find this type of anecdote in a *sīra* that is written almost entirely in a very lofty register, and indeed surrounded by laudatory prose, but we will see shortly that

[11] "*Mitzarkish*", El-Said Badawi & Martin Hinds, *A Dictionary of Egyptian Arabic* (Beirut: Librairie du Liban, 1986), 369. On the *kalawta,* see N.A. Stillman, "Clothing and Costume", in *Medieval Islamic Civilization: An Encyclopedia, volume 1,* ed. J.W. Meri (New York: Routledge, 2006), 162.
[12] Arabe 1705, 55v-56v.
[13] See for example, *Faḍl,* 169, where Qalāwūn himself uses the Syrian dialect form "*laysh*" ("why?") in a question. In the excerpt in Arabe 1705 quoted above the (still rather colloquial) form "*li-ayy shayʾ*" is used.

there is in fact a harmony to the account that becomes evident if we evaluate it as a whole and read through the final excerpt, immediately following this anecdote:

ولما ظفّر الله دولة مولانا السلطان وجعل شعارها الصَلاح والإصلاح * ودابها فيمن شهر بالفساد إشهار السلاح * وتفاقم أمر هاولاي القوم * جهر لسان سيفه بضليله ولم يرض بالإشمام ولا الرَوم * وتقدّمت أوامره العالية الى الأمير جمال الدين الأفرم نائب السلطنة المعظّمة بالشام المحروس بأن يركب بالعساكر من دمشق المحروسة، والى الأمير سيف الدين اسندمر نائب السلطنة بحصن الأكراد والفتوحات // بأن يركب ممن بها من العساكر، والى الأمير شمس الدين سنقرجاه المنصوري نائب السلطنة بصفد بأن يركب ممن عنده من العساكر ويقصدون هذا الجبل في وقتٍ واحدٍ ويستأصلون شأفة هاولاى المرَدة المُردية * وأن لا يقبلون في أراقة دمهم ما عسى أن يبدلوه من دية * فبادروا الى المراسم الشريفة واجتمعوا * وعلى هلاكهم أجمعوا * وأحاطواهم من كل جانب * وضيقوا عليهم المذاهب * وتسنّموا اليهم الجبال الشاهقة * وحزّوا غلاصمهم التى كانت عندما شاهدوا ما أحاط شاهقة * // فأخذت روسهم * وعوجلت بالذل روسهم * ولعب فيهم السيف بحَده * وحنق عليهم فأذاقهم بقايمه إقامة حد حَده * وأراح منهم البلاد والعُبّاد * ومحي أمر مددهم محو المداد * وأخلى ربوعهم منهم * وأفرد ديارهم فلا مخبر مد عنهم * وجعلهم عبرةً لكل مفسِد * وسَير نبأ واقعتهم على لسان كل متهم و منجِد * وصدقتهم العزائم فحت وبحت ومن صدق نجا * وسطر الله هذه الحسنة في صحائف مولانا السلطان وأضافها الى ما له من عدلٍ وإحسانه *

When God made the *dawla* of our lord the sultan victorious and established his symbols of righteousness and restoration * and drove it to unsheathe weapons against the one notorious for corruption. * And when the case of these people became grave, * [the sultan] raised the voice of his sword, emitting sound, unsatisfied with wrong pronounciation and with slurring the vowels.[14] * So his lofty instructions were given to the amir Jamāl al-Dīn al-Afram, the viceroy in well-guarded Syria, to ride forth with the armies from well-guarded Damascus, and to the amir Sayf al-Dīn Asandamur, the viceroy in Ḥiṣn al-Akrād and the conquered [castles in the area] to ride forth with their regiments, and to the amir Shams al-Dīn Sunqurjāh al-Manṣūrī the viceroy of Safad to ride forth with those armies with him, and [that all of them] direct themselves to this mountain at a single time to uproot the ulcer of this rebellious apostates. * [They were ordered] not to acquiesce the disease of their blood through what may be compensated by blood-money. * They responded to the noble decrees and gathered, * and agreed upon their killing, * surrounding them from all sides, * besieging them in various ways, * climbing the towering mountains towards them, * incising their epiglottises which were braying as soon as they witnessed how [they were being] encircled. * Then their heads were taken * and their chiefs rushed [to bow down] humbly. * The sword played among them with its cutting edge, * as it was resentful towards them, and it gave them the taste of its pummel with the recovery of the limit of its inhibition. * He released the lands and worshippers of

[14] Lane, *An Arabic-English Lexicon,* vol. 1:1193.

them,[15] * effaced their lifetimes by the obliteration of ink. * They depleted the regions of them, * setting aside their lands so that no message remained of them. * And He made them an example (ʿ*ibra*) for every corrupt person, * and sent out the tidings of their incident by way of the tongue of every one who suspects or supports [them]. * What foreign body was in it, stopped being among the people of Syria, * and the firm resolutions spoke the truth, scraping off and becoming pure, and he who was sincere was delivered. * And God recorded this good deed on the pages of our lord the sultan and added them to what he has of justice and his beneficence.[16]

The structural composition of this chapter can be read as an ABA'-form, in which A and A' are written in similar, lyrical prose typical of chancery writings — and of much of the *sīra* — and B for a remarkably simple, thoroughly anecdotal register. What is more, the specific word choices of this last part highlight the text's interest in language as a performative tool: the ʿAshīr are described as emitting "braying" sounds – i.e. the opposite of *language* – and their epiglottises – the crucial human organ for speech – were incised. Earlier the sultan's sword is described as "raising the voice of his sword" which reacts against "wrong pronounciation" and "slurring the vowels". As such, Shāfiʿ is instrumentalising language itself as a domain of competition and performance, in which the sultan's glory is in large part expressed through lofty language or metaphorically defended by way of swords as tongues. We shall see below (6.2.1.1.) that this was a rather salient feature of Shāfiʿ's conceptualisation of a sultan's political project, especially in his dealings with enemies, as similar ideas are also discursively (that is, by way of word choices) expressed when he talks about diplomatic dealings with the Mongols under Qalāwūn. The interplay between the two registers thus has a rhetorical effect, but it also has a structural logic, for there is a clear development visible here: A introduces the subject in the timeless register traditionally favoured by Shāfiʿ in this *sīra* (and elsewhere), while B in its anecdotal form as it were constructs an *exemplum* of this people's deviance, refracting the historical narration by way of its "realistic effect".[17] Where the first part introduces the problem of this people in general, lyrical terms, B

[15] This phrase appears in very similar form in Ibn al-Dawādārī's *Kanz al-durar,* vol. 9:131, where a very short account of this expedition is concluded with the statement: *wa-arāḥa Allāh taʿālā min fasādi-him al-ʿubbād*. The coupling of *bilād* and ʿ*ubbād* seems to have been relatively common practice (see for an entirely unrelated example Ibn Kathīr, *al-Bidāya wa-l-nihāya,* ed. ʿAbdallāh b. ʿAlī al-Muḥsin al-Turkī (Gizeh: Hijar li-l-ṭabāʿa wa-l-nashr wa-l-tawzīʿ wa-l-iʿlān, 1998), vol. 17:727 (incorrectly vocalised by the author as ʿ*ibād*)), but the fact that it appears twice in such a similar form suggests either that one of the two authors got his information from the other, or that both were inspired by a third party.

[16] Arabe 1705, 56v-57v.

[17] Paraphrasing Joel Fineman, "The History of the Anecdote: Fiction and Fiction" in *The New Historicism,* ed. H.A. Veeser (New York: Routledge, 1989), 61.

serves to make the aberrant practices of the ʿAshīr tangible by way of an amusing but telling anecdote. A' is not just a reprise of the discourse in A then, but a developed form in which the actions are represented not just as a logical result of the preposition in A, but also as a reaction to the exemplified moral divergence in B.

What does this peculiar anecdote tell us about the use of stylistic registers by our authors in general? I have noted that the anecdote's use of colloquialisms, though extreme, is not unprecedented in our author's works. Furthermore this oscillation between registers served a narrative goal to strengthen Shāfiʿ's eventual conclusion in this section by way of the anecdotal production of the "real" within an otherwise rather abstract *sajʿ* rendering. In other excerpts where colloquialisms pop up the contrast is usually less extreme, but here too the contexts are thoroughly anecdotal, appearing in renderings of the sultan's direct speech.[18] In fact, this type of practice is also not unique to our authors, as Nasser Rabbat has argued that several historians of the period rendered direct speech by *mamlūks* and sultans – who, it will be remembered, were typically not native speakers of Arabic – in colloquial registers to convey "a sense of derision and insolence", amounting to "deliberate misrepresentation" as a form of political and social criticism.[19] The examples found in Shāfiʿ's texts seem to confirm this evaluation at least as far as *who* is represented by colloquial registers: the sultan and the unnamed soldier who transmitted this anecdote to the author. Whether or not it worked as criticism of the political elites here is less clear, but it is certainly true that register was a powerful narrative tool and one more way in which an author could flex his muscles for specific ends. Most of the time this would be done through elaborate *sajʿ* of which we have by now seen several examples, but this case study highlights that it could also be used in other registers and that language was a flexible performative tool.

6.1.2 Discourse as performance of social status: The secret and the public

Registers of language thus existed within the texts, but there were also different registers within the more narrow context of correspondence writing. More particularly, there were hierarchical divisions of status within the *dīwān al-inshāʾ* and these would become increasingly important to authors working in this context. This is for example

[18] There is also an example in *Tashrīf,* 112-113, where Ibn ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir renders direct speech by Alfonso X of Castile by using a colloquialism.
[19] N. Rabbat, "Representing the Mamluks in Mamluk Historical Writing", in *The Historiography of Islamic Egypt (c. 950-1800),* ed. H. Kennedy (Leiden: Brill, 2000), 71-72.

visible in the excerpt from *al-Alṭāf al-khafiyya* discussed above in 5.2.5., in which Ibn ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir describes in laudatory language the sultan's decision to have his prominent *kuttāb* deal only with important correspondence, while minor correspondence would from now on be overseen by his viceroy and vizier. Clearly, the idea is here that certain types of correspondence were better suited for a leading *kātib,* and that he as such deserved the closest relationship of advice to the sultan in this matter. Beyond "sultanic correspondence" (*al-mukātabāt al-sulṭāniyya*), our author does not define what exactly the distinction between minor and major correspondence would amount to, but it is clearly a distinction of importance within the narrative framework.

The distinction may in fact be the one between the "public" and the "secret", which our authors refer to at some points. For example, Shāfiʿ introduced himself as the one who "wrote for [Qalāwūn] in secret and publicly" (*wa katabtu ʿan-hu sirran wa-jahran*), without however defining what this distinction referred to.[20] ʿIzz al-Dīn b. Shaddād's description of the role of the *dawādār* is somewhat enlightening about this meaning of the "secret":

> وهم الذين يقرأون له كتب الأسرار الواردة عليه من الملوك وهم الذين يجيبون عنها ويسرفون بينه وبين وزرائه وكتّابه.
>
> [The *dawādārs*] are the ones who read to [the sultan] the letters of secrets (*kutub al-asrār*) which are sent to him by kings, and they are the ones who respond to [these letters] and travel between [the sultan] and his viziers and *kuttāb*.[21]

The "secret" is thus clearly linked to high-profile correspondence with foreign rulers. The specific responsibility of the *dawādār* explained here by Ibn Shaddād would exactly for this reason be transferred to those of the *kātib al-sirr* — which, it will be remembered, was instated during the reign of Qalāwūn according to most historians — to diminish the number of persons involved in matters of correspondence and to bridge the distance between the sultan and the composition of letters in his name more efficiently. The function is usually rendered in English as "confidential secretary", which highlights the close advisory status of the position, but somewhat misses its crucial importance of high-profile correspondence. Ibn ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir claims that he was "acquainted with [the

[20] The terms "*jahr*" and "*sirr*" as contrastive discursive elements were commonly used in phrases where they are complementary on a literary level. See for example a usage with a very different meaning quoted from al-Thaʿālibī in B. Orfali, "Employment Opportunities in Literature in Tenth-Century Islamic Courts", in *Studying the Near and Middle East at the Institute for Advanced Study, Princeton 1935-2018,* ed. S. Schmidtke (Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias Press, 2018), 244.
[21] *Tārīkh al-Malik al-Ẓāhir,* 242.

sultanate's] innermost secrets," which reads in the first place as denoting confidentiality.[22] Similar ideas are expressed by al-Nuwayrī when he talks about the *kuttāb al-inshāʾ* as those:

> هم بصدده من الصدارة والوجاهة * والنبالة والنباهة * والفصاحة والصباحة * (...) ولِما تصدّوا له من كتم أسرار الدُول * وتردّوا به من محاسن الأواخر ومآثر الأُول * والتحفوا به من مطارف الفضائل والمكارم * وتحلوا به من صفات الأفاضل والأكارم *
>
> who are in nearness to [the sultan] pre-eminent and influential, of exalted rank and renown, eloquent and graceful [...]; and who turn their heads towards him in helping to conceal the secrets of *dawla*'s, furnishing him with [accounts about] the merits of the recent[ly deceased] and the exploits of the first [men], wrapping it up for him with the clothing of virtues and noble traits, sweetening it for him with the characteristics of the excellent and most honourable [men].[23]

We could leave the matter at the fact that *sirr* was simply and quite logically the common term to denote confidential state correspondence, and that our authors referred to it so regularly because they had been themselves responsible for writing such texts, and thus could claim a close association with the "secret". The concept of the secret of course contains a notion of intimacy which, considering the hierarchies of courtly environments, is not self-evident for any courtly agent. As Maaike van Berkel recently noted, "[d]iscretion and the keeping of the ruler's secrets is a recurring topic in mirror literature throughout the Islamic world", and this was so exactly because it was such a central responsibility for the ruler's closest advisors.[24] More broadly considered, Muhsin al-Musawi has argued that such arguments can already be found in the foundational writings on *kitāba* by ʿAbd al-Ḥamīd b. Yaḥyā al-Kātib (d. 132 / 750) in which the "tone is set" for "the chancery as an institution with a large number of scribes, functionaries, and writers whose role was to be the ears, eyes, and tongues of the ruler and hence to share authority as his counselors".[25]

It is however worthwhile to ponder more deeply the meanings attached to "the secret" by our authors, as well as the ways they may have used it in status performance. Clearly there was something to the term that resonated as a factor of distinction.[26]

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[22] *Rawḍ,* 46. See also 4.3.1. for a more detailed discussion of the passage in which this phrase appears.
[23] Al-Nuwayrī, *Nihāyat al-arab,* 8:145.
[24] M. van Berkel, "The People of the Pen", 434. Of course one of the most widely attested examples of this type of literature was known as *Sirr al-asrār,* "The Secret of Secrets."
[25] Al-Musawi, *The Medieval Islamic Republic of Letters,* 307.
[26] I am using this term slightly differently to how Pierre Bourdieu did. He predominantly used it as an analytical concept in the study of cultural *consumption* and the social construction of cultural "taste", whereas

Consider for example the fact that Shāfiʿ b. ʿAlī used the derived form *sirriyya* in the title of his abridged *sīra* of Baybars. The meaning is not entirely clear, but the connotations of this title for a *sīra* that was in important ways linked to the practice of writing confidential correspondence both by the original author and the abridger is significant. Consider also this excerpt from an *inshāʾ* praise to the sultanic fleet included in Ibn ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir's *al-Alṭāf al-khafiyya* – which, it will be remembered also contained the section on the importance of correspondence in the sultan's *dawla*:

> وما سُميت الصناعة بصناعة الإنشاء * إلا أنّ الشوانى من أسرار المُلك والأسرار يجب أن يكون مستودعها مصان عن الأفشاء * ولأنها المنشآت في البحر كالأعلام * وكم أعتنق صاريها قرية فكانا كالألف واللام * وكم طُوى فيها قلع طيّ السِجِل للكتاب * وكم رامت الشمس أن تطلب منها لحبالها من حبالها مثالاً مطلقاً لمّا تقطّعت بحبال الشمس[27] الأسباب * وكم بعلمها المنشور إستقطعت مدينة *
>
> The craft was not named the craft of *inshāʾ,* unless because the fleet belongs to the secrets of kingship, the repository of which needs to be as a preservation of its divulgence, and because [ships] are the [sultanate's] foundations at sea like banners. For how [the ships'] masts embrace the shipyard as if they were like [the letters] *alif* and *lām*! How they conceal a sail [as if it were] the fold of a letter's seal! How the sun desires to ask from them to ensnare her in its nets as an absolute example, as means of subsistence are severed by the sun's rays. And how [one can see] in their mark an edict granting a city as an *iqṭāʿ*![28]

This is only a small part of a much longer section praising the sultan's efforts for building a fleet and ultimately ending on a sixteen-line poem on the same subject. In the rest of the piece, the fleet's oars are compared to eyelashes, the fleet itself is a sign or

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I am using it here mostly as descriptive of the *goals* of cultural *production* by specific authors, without making the larger leap towards broader social appreciation of such ideas yet. Of course, production presupposes some form of consumption and our authors used concepts within a communicative framework that would allow readers to understand at least part of their performative claims to distinction, but for this second part of this dissertation, my analysis is only focused on the production side of the process. I will formulate some ideas on consumption in the third part.

[27] Possibly a reference to the following poem by Abū l-ʿAlāʾ al-Maʿarrī, considering its use of the term *ḥibāl al-shams* and *fulk (*highlighted below). If so, the reference would mean that Ibn ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir built a slightly subversive construction here, for al-Maʿarrī's poem is highly critical of kingship:

تسمت رجال بالملوك سفاهة	ولا ملك إلا للذي خلق الملكا
أرى فلكا ما دار إلا لحكمة	فلا تنس من أجرى، لحاجتك، **الفلكا**
ومدت **حبال الشمس** من قبل عصرنا	على أمم لم تترك لهم سلكا
وتعجبنا الدنيا الهلوك، وإنها	لأم رجال كلهم سقي الهلكا
هما حالتا سوء: حياة بلوعة	وموت، فخير هذه النفس أو تلكا

Abū l-ʿAlāʾ al-Maʿarrī, *Al-Luzūmiyāt,* ed. Amīn ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz al-Khānjī (Cairo-Beirut: Maktabat al-Khānjī and Maktabat al-Hilāl, 1342/1923), vol. 2:153.

[28] *Alṭāf*, 57-58.

miracle (*āya*) of kingship, while angels accompany its seabound journey: in short, a typical sampling of the endless possibilities of *inshāʾ* composition. Yet, the excerpt I chose here is a highly interesting one because of the specific way it compares the importance of this martial institute to the official practice of *inshāʾ*. Not only are the ships' masts like the letters *alif* and *lām,* likely the most commonly written Arabic letters and thus immediately connected to the *kātib*'s claims to guardianship to written text "as the foundation of his craft",[29] and its sails like the seals (*sijill*) used to seal the correspondence written by them, the comparison is in the first place made because both "belong to the secrets of kingship" (*min asrār al-mulk*). We thus get a direct association of the craft (*ṣināʿa*) of *inshāʾ* with the concept of the secret, the confidential, which is further stressed by use of words and verbs that bear layers of meaning related to concealment and hiding. Perhaps most fundamentally: by referring to this conceptualisation Ibn ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir is once more able to share the stage he erected himself for the praise of the sultan and his victorious fleet. The professional practice of *inshāʾ* of which he himself was one of the primary ambassadors becomes central to the argument. The "secret" as such in all its flexible meaning becomes one more area in which the *kātib* may perform his "distinction". Analogous to how the "gates" (*al-abwāb*) were the symbol of a highly restricted access to court, the secret and the limited access to it functions in a similarly restrictive social discourse. Both Ibn ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir and Shāfiʿ had access to this secret and mastered the ways in which its specific discursive iterations could be formulated, and conveyed that idea subtly in their *sīra*'s.

Language being central to our authors' self-presentation, it is not surprising that they carefully and meaningfully integrated its aspects throughout their texts, both by using various registers and styles of language and by writing actual discourses on the importance of language to the sultan's *dawla*. Such discourses fundamentally tied in with the earlier noted instrumental part of the three-pronged argument presented by our authors for the importance of *sīra:* the *kātib* is the absolute master of language, so he is the one most suited for writing an account of the sultan's life and deeds in a variety of language registers. If writing is indeed a "gathering", then *sīra* was the context in which a great variety of evidence for this claim to writerly excellence and versatility could be brought together. This is even more the case if we look at more formal *types* of writing being gathered within these texts, to which we shall turn now.

[29] Gully, *The Culture of Letter Writing*, vi.

6.2 Compilation

The inclusion of various documents is without a doubt the primary reason why the *sīra*'s have received a relatively high amount of attention from scholars. In the absence of surviving systematic archives, these texts — as well as scribal manuals, letter collections, and other historiographical texts — are an important gateway into understanding the modalities of diplomatic exchange in the period. The idea has even been raised that the copying of texts into narrative historiography or compendia partly explains why so few original documents survive from the pre-Ottoman period, and none in traditional archival contexts, i.e. it is suggested that the copied documents made the originals obsolete. In Western Medieval studies, the idea of the archive as a flexible institution which may even be used as a "personal record" in the performative sense has gained much ground,[30] and the conceptualisation of pre-modern Middle Eastern archives and archival practices has been much finetuned in recent years as well, but the evaluation of documents included in narrative chronicles and scribal manuals has not been fundamentally reconsidered.[31] The quoting of correspondence, poetry, and other assorted material in historiographical contexts is simply seen as the way in which historians wrote or compiled books since the beginning of the Islamic historiographical tradition. It is of course true that neither of our authors is unique in quoting a great deal of original diplomatic and poetic material, neither among contemporary authors nor in Islamic historiography in general, but in the following I will offer some insights into these processes in the context of the corpus of sultanic *sīra* which may enlighten such practices in broader contexts.

6.2.1 *Inshāʾ* writings

Traditionally, when reference is made to compilation in the context of historical works, authors are primarily referring to the official documents included. As we shall see below, one should also consider other material in this compilatory context, especially poetry, but I shall start with this most conventional compilatory form. None of these texts have compilation of official documents as their primary goal, but they do include

[30] See for an overview of studies as well as an application to a very particular type of "compiled" text: F. Buylaert & J. Haemers, "Record-Keeping as Status Performance in the Early Modern Low Countries", *Past and Present* 230 (2016), 131-150.
[31] Konrad Hirschler explicitly leaves out this "very rich corpus" in his important study "From Archive to Archival Practices", 3.

them prominently in the textual construction. Documents are both cited in full and in paraphrased form — the former often announced by *wa-nuskhatu-hu* ("and its transcript [runs as follows]") while the latter is usually signposted by *wa-maḍmūnu-hu* ("and its content is"). I have listed the types of documents — broadly defined to also include texts which are explicitly noted as *inshāʾ* writing, but which we would not usually file under "documents", such as a prose *tahniʾa,* or "congratulation" — in Table 3 on the next page.

For reasons of space it is impossible to evaluate every one of these documents, so I will limit myself to two specific clusters of examples in this immediate section — only the first cluster of which actually appears in the table below, for reasons that will become clear — that throw some interesting light on the reasons for and logic behind the inclusion of documents in our texts. A number of further documents will be discussed in 6.2.3. to evaluate the particular performative uses of such document quotations. The choice for the first cluster, the correspondence between Qalāwūn and his Ilkhanid adversary, is given in by its central position within two of our authors' texts, so we can explore both the similarities and differences of how our authors dealt with these compiled documents. While this means that other documents are usually much less extensively framed or glossed, they are still representative of wider compilatory processes, as I will show with another short example at the end of 6.2.1.1. The second cluster dealt with in 6.2.1.2. is less representative, as I have not been able to trace similar examples, but is important because it gives crucial insights into another way in which compilation likely worked, namely as an integral part of the composition of *sīra*.

Document type	*al-Rawḍ al-zāhir*	*Tashrīf al-ayyām*	*al-Alṭāf al-khafiyya*	*al-Faḍl al-ma'thūr*	*Ḥusn al-manāqib*	*Sīrat al-Malik al-Nāṣir*
Fully quoted letters	7	6		11	3	1
Paraphrases or excerpts of letters	6	3	1	1		
Taqlīd (Diploma of investiture)	2	1	2	1 (*iqṭāʿ*)	2	1
Full *tadhkira* (memorandum)	1			2		
Paraphrased *tadhkira*	1			1		
Khuṭba (Friday sermon)	1		1	1	1	
Futuwwa investiture	1		1			
Truces/peaces		4				
Inscription	1					
inshāʾī praise documents		1		4		
ʿAqd (marriage contract)					1	
Waqf			2			
Of which explicitly self-written	3	2	1	11	2	2

Table 3: amount of documents per *sīra*

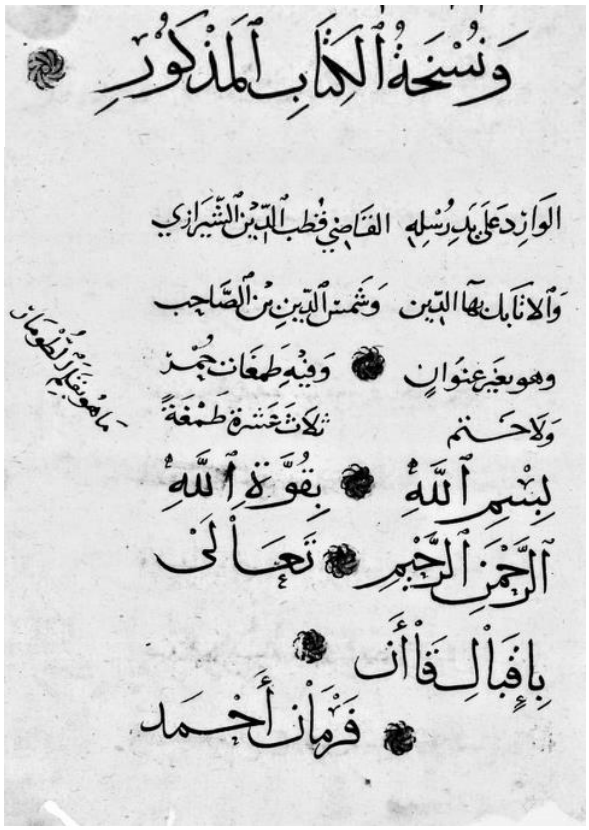
6.2.1.1 The diplomatic correspondence between Aḥmad Tegüder and Qalāwūn

Perhaps the best studied documents in our corpus are those that derive from the diplomatic exchange between Aḥmad Tegüder (reign 681/1282 - 683/1284) and Qalāwūn, which I have already referred to above. As the contents of these letters have been well analysed before, I will here pay only basic attention to their contents and focus predominantly on their textual embeddedness. The contextual historical information has been perused in quite some detail before as well, but there are a number of comments and specific phrasings that deserve closer attention, as does the general narrative pacing, both of which are interesting for our purposes of understanding the ways in which compilation worked as an integral part of composition. Parts of the correspondence appear in Ibn ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir's *Tashrīf al-ayyām* and Shāfiʿ b. ʿAlī's *al-Faḍl al-maʿthūr.* The letters also appear in other sources, which I will not be considering here, as I am only interested in the ways these letters are used in the *sīra*'s.[32]

Ibn ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir's letters are spread over two sections of his *sīra* of Qalāwūn, both in the second of the text's three original volumes. He extensively historicises the context of these letters by detailing the events that led to the ascension and conversion of Aḥmad Tegüder and subsequent power struggles among the Mongol elites. He also includes a paraphrase of a letter sent by Aḥmad to Baghdād to communicate the good news (*bushrā*) of his conversion to the people of that city, and later a letter that is noted as a "*mutarjam*" "from the most informed about the hidden issues of the people", i.e. a letter sent by an informant or spy in Mongol lands.[33] Ibn ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir both times describes the concealed travel of the messengers who would convey the letter and an oral message to Cairo. The first letter is introduced as follows, with strong visual emphasis in the manuscript:

[32] The letters are dealt with in these studies: P.M. Holt, "The Ilkhān Aḥmad's Embassies to Qalāwūn", 128-132; Adel Allouche, "Teguder's Ultimatum to Qalawun", *IJMES*, 22/4 (1990), 437-446; Judith Pfeiffer, "Aḥmad Tegüder's Second Letter to Qalā'ūn (682/1283)", in *History and Historiography of Post-Mongol Central Asia and the Middle East,* ed. J. Pfeiffer & Sholeh A. Quinn (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2006), 167-202; Anne F. Broadbridge, *Kingship and Ideology*, 38-44. Pfeiffer's article contains an excellent unraveling of the various works which refer to or quote all this material (as well as additional material), see especially the abundant notes on pp. 169-171. Her article also contains the best contextualization of these letters within the tumultuous political developments in the Ilkhanid empire.

[33] *Tashrīf,* 63-66. من أكبر مطّلعين على بواطن القوم



ونسخة الكتاب المذكور الوارد على يد رسله القاضي قطب الدين الشيرازي والاتابك بهاء الدين وشمس الدين بن الصاحب وهو بغير عنوانٍ ولا ختم وفيه طمغات حُمر ثلاث عشرة طمغة

The text of this aforementioned letter which arrived by the hand of its messengers — the *qāḍī* Quṭb al-Dīn al-Shīrāzī, the *atabek* Bahāʾ al-Dīn and Shams al-Dīn b. al-Ṣāḥib[34] — and [this text] is lacking a signature and a seal, and on it are red Mongol seals, [to be precise] thirteen seals.[35]

After this, the letter's invocation follows, but there is also an interesting marginal insertion, written in a different hand as the main text, which the text's editors have not rendered. At about the same height as what we may call the formal description of the text, there is a note stating "*mā huwa bi-qalami l-ṭūmāri*", or "what is [written] by the pen of the scroll", which seems to denote the type of scribal hand in which the document was written.[36] The second Mongol letter also contains such notes, but no formal description of the document: here the first lines are also noted as "by the pen of the scroll", but the start of the text is noted as "*mā huwa bi-qalam al-tawqīʿāt*", or "what is [written] by the pen of registration" (see reproduction in 5.2.4. above for positioning). The handwriting in the manuscript itself does not change, so these notes must refer to a difference in hands in the original document, which was deemed important enough to communicate to the *sīra*'s readers. The documentary, if not archival value of including such letters within the *sīra* is thus clearly visible here.

Ibn ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir thus exhibits a keen interest in the formal qualities of these particular letters, which he — notably — never does for letters received from other

[34] These persons have been mentioned in more detail by Ibn ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir a page earlier.
[35] *Tashrīf*, 6; *Arabe 1704*, 8v (the three first words)-9r.
[36] The end of the first letter is also clear because it is followed immediately by Qalāwūn's answer, itself introduced as "*wa-kataba mawlā-nā al-sulṭān jawāba-hu*" and then again a very large script incipit, *Arabe 1704,* 18v.

rulers, although he does more or less the same for a letter from Tegüder's predecessor Abaghā (d. 680 / 1282) received during Baybars' reign.[37] Of course, the Īlkhānids were at this time the biggest military threat to Qalāwūn, and it is not really a surprise that the relatively rare occurrence of direct diplomatic exchange with this Mongol court was given such a detailed and prominent place in the textual construction. The distinctive visual marking of the three fully reproduced letters from this correspondence in *Tashrīf al-ayyām* may be seen in this light: this is material that was meant to be easily retrievable by the reader interested in this momentous diplomatic exchange. However, the relatively detailed formal description of the first document received can also be read differently: the fact that Ibn ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir remarks that the document lacks a seal and signature shows that these were considered to be normal features of letters for him. By contrast, this document is somewhat of an aberration, a badly produced letter which our author only includes because of its historical importance.

This may seem like reading too much into this short statement, but Shāfiʿ's discussion of these letters makes the supposition less tenuous. Shāfiʿ only includes two letters from this diplomatic exchange: Aḥmad's first letter and Qalāwūn's reponse. Like Ibn ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir, he rather extensively contextualises these letters, noting the historical circumstances in which they should be read. All this information has been studied before, but a comment by Shāfiʿ right before he gives the first letter's text is remarkable, albeit not easily rendered in English:

وقد قعقع فيه قعقعة الأعجام * وأراد ان يزيّنه بالإعراب فشانه بالإعجام

> And in [this letter] the noises of the Persians clattered * and [Jamāl al-Dīn b. ʿĪsā, the Mongol letter's author] intended to beautify it with [the markings for] desinential inflection and he then disfigured it with diacritical points.[38]

It is clear from this short statement that Shāfiʿ did not think very highly of his distant colleague's prose: apparently, its use of vocalisation to signpost the correct pronounciation was erratic and the stylistic register was too "Persian".[39] I have translated here according to the most literally relevant meaning, but the words used also have a number of associations that broaden the insult. The Persian element of the

[37] *Rawḍ,* 339-441.

[38] *Faḍl,* 94; *Marsh 424,* 68r. Neither form of اعجام is vocalised in the manuscript, so I am following Tadmurī's editorial choice here. Holt already drew attention to this comment in passing: "The Īlkhān Aḥmad's Embassies", 128.

[39] It is somewhat ironic then that the vocalisation in Shāfiʿ's surviving *sīra*'s has been called faulty by several modern scholars. See for example Lewicka, 92. Even more so considering the relatively high amount of Persian words used by our authors in the remainder of their texts.

comment is in fact more thorough than it appears at first sight: the root letters for the term by which Persians (and non-Arabs in general) are designated, *ʿ-j-m,* usually in the form *ʿajam,* reappears in the last word *iʿjām,* that is, "diacritical points".[40] Shāfiʿ also uses the word *iʿrāb,* or "desinential inflection" in the second cola, a term that is derived from the root letters *ʿ-r-b,* or "Arab". As such, he establishes a contrast between Persians and Arabs, which may be extrapolated to a contrast between Tegüder, who ruled predominantly Persian-speaking lands, and Qalāwūn, who ruled predominantly Arabic-speaking lands. It does not end there, for Shāfiʿ's choice for the verb *shāna,* meaning "to disfigure" has an association with the first verb *qaʿqaʿa,* as in the saying "*mā yuqaʿqaʿa la-hu bi-l-shināni*", which means among other things that one does not let oneself be intimidated by imagined dangers.[41] Of course, this phrase does not literally appear, but the pairing of the verb *qaʿqaʿa* and another verb which is not etymologically related to *shinān* but looks similar to it would likely have triggered this association according to the stylistic figure of "*al-jināS al-mudhayyal*" or "tailed paronomasia" as distinguished by al-Nabulsī (and translated by Pierre Cachia).[42] Considering the threatening tone of Aḥmad's letter and the belittling tone of Qalāwūn's response, Shāfiʿ's comment participates in the discourse in which the letter's threat is waved aside. It communicates both the idea that Aḥmad's letter was badly written and that Cairo was not afraid.[43]

Similar ideas are present in Shāfiʿ's general narrative portrayal of the Mongol messengers, the specific phrasings of which deserves closer attention. Shāfiʿ tells us that upon receiving Qalāwūn's response, Aḥmad Tegüder decided to send his shaykh ʿAbd al-Raḥmān, who had been named as the one responsible for Aḥmad's conversion in the first letter, to Cairo. As other scholars have noted, the descriptions of the shaykh's journey tell us how Qalāwūn's agents humiliated the shaykh and his retinue, how he was covertly brought to Aleppo and had to wait until after the death of Aḥmad Tegüder before even being granted an audience — although Shāfiʿ and Ibn ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir disagree on this timing, as we shall see. In addition to providing us with this historical information, Shāfiʿ uses the occasion to construct a narrative set-up to strengthen the

[40] One can see the etymology of the word from the fact that only *ʿajamī* people would have needed these signs to correctly read an Arabic text in the early Islamic period.
[41] Kazimirski, *Dictionnaire arabe-français,* 2:784. Muʿāwiyya is said to have used this proverb when addressing a party from ʿAlī's camp during the Battle of Ṣiffīn, in the famous account given by al-Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh al-rusul wa-l-mulūk,* ed. Muḥammad Abū l-Faḍl Ibrāhīm, (Cairo: Dār al-maʿārif bi-Miṣr, 1960) vol. 5:5.
[42] *The Arch Rhetorician,* 29. See also "(pseudo-)derivative paronomasia", ibid. 29-30.
[43] It should be noted that the scholars who have studied these letters before (Holt, Allouche, Pfeiffer, Broadbridge) disagree on the degree to which the Mongol letter was really a threat or call for submission or whether it was in fact a call for Islamic cooperation and to settle border disagreements. I am most inclined to follow Pfeiffer's evaluation of the letter as a call for cooperation, considering Tegüder's contemporary political situation, but in any case, there is a clear element of Mongol superiority in the letter which may be read in several ways, and the fact that both powers were at the time technically still at war remains meaningful of course.

derogatory tone, with a number of comments that could be read literally but have major symbolic meaning. When describing how Aḥmad prepared "his shaykh and the one who guided him to Islam" (*shaykhi-hi wa-l-hādī la-hu ilā l-islām*) to go to Cairo, he adds the afterthought "as he claimed" (*ka-mā zaʿama*).[44] As in Qalāwūn's letter, the earnestness of Aḥmad's conversion is not taken entirely seriously, and we can thus see how Shāfiʿ's narrative context for these letters interacts with the letter's contents.[45] But there is more: in this same description, Shāfiʿ tells us that Aḥmad "raised above [the shaykh's] head the *jitr,* that is a leather cupola", about which al-Qalqashandī tells us it was "among the symbols of the sultanate" and that it was lavishly decorated.[46] One is reminded of the *qubba wa-l-ṭayr,* the palanquin carried above the Mamluk sultan when he rode out.[47] However, soon after they crossed into Mamluk territory, the Mongol party was deprived of this symbol and were told that only the sultan could ride with the *jitr* in these lands. Shāfiʿ then adds this comment:

فحين عدى ما تعدّى وحطّ مرفوعه عن رأسه * وعرف منذ حلّ أرض مولانا السلطان قدر نفسه *

> And as soon as he abandoned that which was excessive (*ʿaddā mā taʿaddā*), and he took down that which was erected above his head (*wa-ḥaṭṭa marfūʿa-hu ʿan raʾsi-hi*) since [their] alighting, the [people in the] territory of our lord the sultan knew the rank of his person.[48]

More than simply a description of a rough treatment, Shāfiʿ takes the symbolic deprivation of the envoys' magnitude as starting point for a rhetorical variation. In this statement he effectively inverts Aḥmad's bestowal of honour to his *shaykh* (*wa-rafaʿa ʿalā raʾsi-hi al-jitr*) by more or less using the same terminology for the opposite action (*wa-ḥaṭṭa marfūʿa-hu ʿan raʾsi-hi*). The choice of verbs in the first cola is furthermore telling, as *ʿaddā* and *taʿaddā* are respectively forms II and V of the radicals *ʿ-d-w,* the substantive form of which, *ʿadūw,* means "enemy," which was commonly used to describe the Mongols.[49] The substantive *ḥall* which I have here translated as "alighting" bears a wide range of meanings, but an important one of those is related to permissible and pure

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[44] *Faḍl,* 113. The editor adds the *sukūn* on the last letter of zaʿama, following the manuscript Marsh 424, 78v. I have chosen to disregard this.
[45] See also, Broadbridge, *Kingship and Ideology,* 42.
[46] *Faḍl,* 113. Al-Qalqashandī is quoted in footnote by the editor. Ibn ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir confirms that the party rode with this *jitr* and adds some further descriptions of the shaykh's elaborate retinue, but his tone is much more straight-forward than his nephew's. *Tashrīf*, 49.
[47] U. Vermeulen, "Une note sur les insignes royaux des mamelouks", in *Egypt and Syria in the Fatimid, Ayyubid and Mamluk Eras,* eds. U. Vermeulen & D. De Smet (Leuven: Peeters, 1995), 356.
[48] *Faḍl,* 113.
[49] As for example, in *Faḍl,* 71, 92.

things, as in *ḥalāl.*[50] We could thus read this statement as a symbolic purification, the enemy's presence being made permissible by deprivation. This is pushed even further by the conclusion that the rank/extent/worth (*qadr*) of the shaykh's *nafs* became known to all — which in fact contradicts other historians telling us about how the shaykh and his retinue were more or less smuggled into Aleppo by night.[51] Again, the choice of words is not random here: *nafs* has an important meaning in Sufism, and as Shāfiʿ repeatedly tells us, this shaykh surrounded himself with Sufis, and *qadr* has important connotations of fate. As such, we may read Shāfiʿ here as telling us that it was the fate of this shaykh who dabbled in Sufism to end up as he did. Unlike in Ibn ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir's account, however, at this point the reader still does not know what will happen (assuming he is not already well informed about these events), so Shāfiʿ's comments are in fact building up narrative tension to be released later on.[52]

Shāfiʿ ridiculed the shaykh's Sufi inclinations at two other points. Right after describing his house arrest in Aleppo he tells us — notably not in *sajʿ* — that "an announcement was sent from the aforementioned governor [Shams al-Dīn Sunqur al-Manṣūrī] in Aleppo about the number [of persons] accompanying [the shaykh], and among the strangest things I saw in there are four sufis (*fuqarāʾ*) intended for murmuring (*zamzama*) and listening (*samāʿ*)".[53] While *samāʿ* is a well established ritual practice in Sufism,[54] *zamzama* was a peculiar practice of droning vocal sounds associated in the first place with Zoroastrian rituals.[55] Considering the Persian background of the shaykh, and Shāfiʿ's earlier quoted attitude towards Persians, our author was clearly questioning the shaykh's (and by extension the Mongol ruler's) Islamic credentials here and suggesting that his Islam was tainted by Persian Zoroastrian traditions.

The Sufi theme is taken furthest when Shāfiʿ describes the *shaykh*'s audience with Qalāwūn in Damascus:

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[50] The verbal form *ḥalla* is used only a few lines later to describe Qalāwūn's arrival in Damascus. *Faḍl,* 115.
[51] *Tashrīf,* 49.
[52] ʿIzz al-Dīn b. Shaddād's *Tārīkh al-Malik al-Ẓāhir* (p. 222) contains a cola that uses very similar terminology when describing how Baybars became sick and eventually died: "*wa-**taʿaddā al-qadru** l-ladhī jaḥṣal li-l-**nafsi** gharaḍa-hā*" ("and fate overtook the one who is overtaken by the soul's intent"), which suggests that these terms were commonly used to describe fateful situations.
[53] *Faḍl,* 115.
وسيّرت مطالعة من النائب المذكور بحلب بعدّة من معه ومن أعجب ما رأيتُ أربع فقراء برسم الزمزمة والسماع.
[54] J. During, "Samāʿ", in *EI2.*
[55] Kazimirski, *Dictionnaire arabe-français,* 1:1011.

ودخل هذا الشيخ في هيئة الفُقراء مُعمَّمًا بفوطة مُرخاةٍ لها عَذَبة بدلقٍ قد طوى كُمَّية وجمجم.

> This shaykh entered in the guise of the Sufis wearing as a turban an Indian cloth from which the extremities [flowed down] with a Sufi robe which had enveloped and concealed his two sleeves.[56]

In the first place this statement has a symmetrical function, as it immediately follows a relatively lengthy description of Qalāwūn's own glorious presence on the throne (*kursī sulṭāni-hi*) in Damascus. The shaykh's peculiar appearance immediately stresses the contrast for the reader. Indeed, the immediately following section again contrasts this with an encomium on Qalāwūn's lofty appearance. But there is again more to the statement, as Shāfiʿ makes full use of the ambiguities inherent to the Arabic language. The sentence describing his turban could also be read as a variation of the proverb "*arkhā ʿamāmata-hu*", that is, "he has unwinded his turban", meaning that someone is at ease and without worries.[57] Considering the highly choreographed nature of courtly audiences at the time, especially in an exchange as tense as that with the Mongol enemy, a relaxed, loose attitude towards protocol would have been seen as extremely inappropriate. This point is strengthened in what follows: the noun *ʿadhaba* here denotes the extremities of the turban, but the root *ʿ-dh-b* also has a verbal connotation of "to hinder, handicap, impede, obstruct" and in form II of "to torment" and "to chastise".[58] Similarly, I have rendered the verb *jamjama* as "concealed", but it also has a very strong connotation of "talking unintelligibly".[59] As such, this section not only presents the *shaykh* as a visual aberration because of his distinctive Sufi clothes, but also as a nuisance to the courtly audience because of his bad speech and inappropriate composure. In fact, a few lines later it is unambiguously stated that the company's presents for the sultan were "found to be deficient" (*astanqaṣa hidiyyata-hum*).[60] When after this first audience the news reached Qalāwūn that Aḥmad had died, the shaykh was brought in front of the sultan again and informed of his patron's death, upon which he fainted and died a few days later. The fates of his two main companions are described in similarly derogatory fashion: Shams al-Dīn b. al-Tītī is said to have been locked away in the Citadel, while the "rabble who came with him" (*raʿāʿ man jāʾa maʿa-hu*), referring most probably to the sufis Shāfiʿ had earlier denigrated, were allowed to leave. Of this al-

[56] *Faḍl,* 115. The edition incorrectly omits the word *qad* before *ṭawā* and is furthermore hindered by a number of confusingly places comma's, which I have disregarded in my reading. Marsh 424, 80r.
[57] Kazimirski, *Dictionnaire arabe-français,* 1:842. See also the highly symbolical episode referred to above (5.2.6.) in which al-Muẓaffar Baybars is said to have thrown down his turban in anger.
[58] Wehr, *Arabic-English Dictionary,* 701.
[59] Kazimirski, *Dictionnaire arabe-français,* 1:323.
[60] *Faḍl,* 116.

Tītī and another companion, however, Shāfiʿ tells us that "it would not have been more commendable (*aḥmad*) if they had been packed with what eluded them from their king Aḥmad [i.e. if they had been killed too]", punning on the meaning of the Īlkhān's Islamic name.[61]

We are thus dealing with much more than just a compilation and historical contextualisation of documents relevant to the diplomatic exchange with Aḥmad Tegüder in *al-Faḍl al-maʾthūr*. Shāfiʿ's text functions as it were as a commentary, in which the author picks up on certain themes found in the letters and amplifies them in narrative form, as it were as an extension of the *inshāʾ* practice of responding to letters, which necessitated the responder to engage with the themes and topics set by the initial sender.[62] This practice is however taken further here, and the engagement continues within the narrative. The fact that Shāfiʿ's account of these letters and the historical happenings runs as a continuous, uninterrupted section in the *sīra* — concluded with the statement that "such was the situation concerning the case of the first and second Tatar envoy" — may mean that he composed it as a cohesive whole.[63] He furthermore paid quite a bit of attention to narrative pacing and character development as well, which is evident from the fact that we get Shāfiʿ's description of the shaykh's audience before we are told of Aḥmad's death, which results in a narrative tension that is only resolved near the end of the section.

Ibn ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir's more straightforward account of this diplomacy works less as a cohesive whole, as it is situated in the midst of the general chronological framework of the text. As a result, the narrative development is divided into chronologically consecutive parts, and the reader knows already well before the account of the shaykh's audience that Aḥmad Tegüder has died. In his description of the audience Ibn ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir does not choose for the building up of tension and rhetorical play we see in his nephew's text — although several parts of Ibn ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir's narrative are also in *sajʿ* —, but tells us that "[shaykh ʿAbd al-Raḥmān] was ordered to kiss the ground, and he declined out of arrogance and haughtiness (*fa-abā kibran wa zahwan*)". We are next told that he was forced to the ground and that his limbs were broken, as were those of his companions. The harsh treatment makes sense here, for the reader of *Tashrīf al-ayyām* already knows that there was at this point no authority backing up the shaykh's misplaced arrogance anymore, whereas Shāfiʿ's description is more aloof for he is holding back that crucial bit of information concerning the Mongol ruler's death to

[61] *Faḍl,* 117.
[62] See on this subject the introductory remarks (as well as the following discussion of diplomatic exhange in another context) by Malika Dekkiche in "The Letter and Its Response: The Exchanges between the Qara Qoyunlu and the Mamluk Sultan: MS Arabe 4440 (BnF, Paris)", *Arabica,* 63/6 (2016), 580-581.
[63] The whole section runs from *Faḍl,* 92-118. Shāfiʿ regularly concludes sections in this relatively idiosyncratic way, both in *Faḍl* and in his *sīra* of al-Nāṣir Muḥammad.

make the actual unveiling of this information all the more effective. Essentially, both authors communicated a similar derogatory attitude towards this Mongol diplomatic exchange, however. Although Shāfiʿ's account may be said to have been more effective in this regard, they both engaged with the letters' discursive matrix of derision and narratively amplified their meaning, going well beyond mere compilation.

The verbal derision evident from the context in which the Mongol letters are included is in fact not unique in this corpus. There is another set of accounts about diplomatic exchange with Nubia in which our authors similarly grasp the occasion to construct accounts in which several ambiguous words are used relating to skin colour.[64] While no letters are quoted in these contexts – one presumes because this Nubian exchange was not deemed as worthy of full comment as Mongol or even Frankish exchanges – we can infer from another letter written by Ibn ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir to the amir Shams al-Dīn Āqsunqur as an answer to the latter's news about the conquest of Nubia that our authors' derision was probably not only expressed within the *sīra* narratives, but also within the letters, thus clearly showcasing the continuity of these discourses about the Nubians which freely migrated across genres.[65] This is not so much an example of document re-use then, but one of discursive re-use across genres, which also shows the continuity of writerly practices in the composition of *sīra*.

6.2.1.2 Documents before history: the re-use of letters as historical narrative

While the letters discussed above are clearly noted by our authors as deriving from an original document form, there is suggestive evidence that other material in our texts also descended from such earlier forms and was reworked to fit into the *sīra*'s. I have already suggested that this may have been the case for the grand narrative construction found in Shāfiʿ's *sīra* of al-Nāṣir Muḥammad, and it was certainly the case for Shāfiʿ's description of the Battle of Homs, which was integrated into *Faḍl*. Furthermore, Shāfiʿ's account of the Mongol letters also suggests that this may have been an integrated whole even before it was embedded in the *sīra.* However, in all these cases, we are only provided with the version of the text as found in the *sīra*'s, and not with presumed earlier forms. What we can say about document reuse is thus by necessity limited. However, there is one example in which we may see this process in more detail: when editing *al-Rawḍ al-zāḥir,* ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz al-Khuwayṭir was confronted with a number of lacunae in the two incomplete manuscripts. For some of these he made use of information quoted by other authors, or he copied the abridged accounts from Shāfiʿ b. ʿAlī's *Ḥusn al-manāqib*, but in one case he made a remarkable choice: he covered up a few

[64] *Alṭāf,* 39-41, especially a poem found on the last page; *Arabe 1705*, 35v-36r.
[65] al-Ṣafadī, *al-Wāfī bi-l-wafāyāt,* 17:135.

missing pages in the Istanbul manuscript which presumably described the outset of Baybars' Anatolian campaign near the end of his reign by using a parallel text quoted by al-Qalqashandī in *Ṣubḥ al-aʿshā.* The choice was not random, for this text is in fact said to be a letter sent by Ibn ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir to the vizier Bahāʾ al-Dīn b. Ḥinnā, whom we have come across before as a powerful agent in Baybars' reign who was also the direct patron of ʿIzz al-Dīn b. Shaddād. Not only is this also a text written by Ibn ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir about the same subject, the letter itself is textually highly similar, though not entirely identical to the text as it picks up again after the manuscript's gap.[66] When comparing the text, one is struck by the fact that despite the overlapping subject matter and the largely similar textual structure, there is a significant degree of difference in phrasings and word choices which goes beyond typical text variation. The text in al-Qalqashandī also includes even more poetry. As an illustration of the amount of divergence between the two recensions, here are the first lines immediately after the gap of the Istanbul manuscript. I have highlighted the differences in colours: green for words or phrases that only appear in the Istanbul manuscript of the *sīra*; red for words, phrases, and lines of poetry that only appear in *Ṣubḥ al-aʿshā*, and orange for a phrase that appears in both texts but in different formulation.

From al-Khuwayṭir's edition[67]	From al-Qalqashandī[68]
الشوهق * إذا هو قد هبط في مأزق متضائق * لم تزل هذه الجبال تأخذنا وترمينا * وتلك المسارب تضمنا * وتلك المشارب لفرط بردها تضميناً * حتى وصلنا الى الحدث الحمراء المسماة الآن بكينوك وقد تقدم ذكرها، وانبثنا وخيلنا مبثوثة فوق الأحيدب كما نثرت الدراهم فوق العروس * وحوافرها على الوكور في أعلى القتن تدوس *	الشواهق * إذا هو متضائل قد هبط في مأزق متضايق * لم تزل هذه الجبال تأخذنا وترمينا * وتلك المسارب تضمُّنا * وتلك المشارب تظميناً تسود الشمس منّا بيض أوجهنا * وتسود بيض العذر واللمم ونترك الماء لا ينفكُّ من سفرٍ * وما سار في الغَيم منه سار في الأدم حتى وصلنا الحدث الحمراء المسماة الآن بكينوك ومعناها المُحرَقة، كان الملك قسطنطين والد صاحب سيس قد أخذها من أصحاب الروم وأحرقها، وتملّكها وعمرها بقصد الضرر لبلاد الإسلام والتجّار [...] فبتنا بها و وانبثنا وخيلنا مبثوثة فوق الأحيدب كما نثرت الدراهم فوق العروس * وجيادنا على الركوب في أعلى العين تدوس *

[66] The section in *Rawḍ* runs from pp. 453-471. The corresponding part of the letter in *Ṣubḥ al-aʿshā* runs from pp. 139-164. The last two paragraphs of the letter as well as a poem are not reproduced in the *sīra*. The letter is very briefly described by Muhsin al-Musawi in "Pre-Modern Belletristic Prose", 111-112. The editor of *Rawḍ*, al-Khuwayṭir does not note that the two texts showcase a significant degree of variance.

[67] *Rawḍ*, 458.

[68] *Ṣubḥ al-aʿshā*, 14:142-143. The square brackets near the end of the excerpt denote about eight lines of historical digression which I have left out for reasons of space. I also left out two editorial additions in the poetic lines, as these corrections were based on the *dīwān* of al-Mutanabbī and do not necessarily represent the textual state of al-Qalqashandī's work.

Without going into detail, one can see that the variation is significant and that the text given by al-Qalqashandī is more elaborate. This is not only true for these first lines, but continues for the remainder of the section. One could argue that this ambiguousness indeed suggests that the text edited by al-Khuwayṭir is a *mukhtaṣar,* as Tarek Sabraa and Ṭaha Ḥasan al-Nāṣir do (see introduction). However, al-Qalqashandī does not claim to have copied this part from the *sīra*, but from a "battle letter" (*risālat al-ghazw*), so he very likely had access to a different form of this text, which formed the basis from which the version included in the *sīra* was derived. Furthermore, the texts are too closely related to really see one as a summary and the other as an original. One may think of Ibn ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir (or perhaps, indeed, one of his students, as Sabraa suggests) finishing his work — likely after the death of Baybars shortly after the events discussed in the letter — by copying the letter he wrote earlier, but at the same time editing it thoroughly. One example of this process seen in this particular excerpt is the fact that the *sīra* leaves out historical information about Kaynūk which runs for several lines in *Ṣubḥ al-aʿshā* (as noted, I have left out eight lines in my reproduction), and replaces it by "*wa-qad taqaddama dhikru-hā*" ("the account of this has already been given"). Indeed, if we retrace our steps in the *sīra,* we find a short account of the history of Kaynūk, some small parts of which are also found in the letter quoted in *Ṣubḥ al-aʿshā,* though the account is not identical.[69] One could envisage it as follows: when adding this part about the Anatolian campaign in the *sīra,* Ibn ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir started copying the letter he had earlier written to Bahāʾ al-Dīn b. Ḥinnā, but when he came to this specific part he might have remembered that he already earlier included an account about Kaynūk, and simply left it out of this textual section so as not to repeat himself unnecessarily.

The letter as such is not the same text, but an earlier incarnation that was thoroughly reworked to fit into the *sīra*'s textual construction and which as such sheds some revealing light on our author's working method. If Ibn ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir reused an earlier written letter to construct this part of the *sīra,* he possibly did so at other points as well, but unfortunately this is difficult to establish with certainty. We owe the fact that this specific letter survives in two redactions entirely to al-Qalqashandī considering it to be a good stylistic example of a "*risālat al-ghazw*", i.e. a letter to inform about fighting activities. No other similar letters or excerpts are quoted by al-Qalqashandī or other authors, nor do any survive in singular form, which would allow us to evaluate other examples of text reuse, but the earlier noted elements of discursive similarities between documents and narrative accounts suggests that the boundaries between the two were often not as strict.[70]

[69] *Rawḍ,* 417-418.

[70] One section in *Tashrīf* informing about the plight of envoys in Castile, is explicitly a paraphrase of a letter from these envoys, presumably sent when they were in Tunis and had already undertaken part of the return

6.2.2 Poetry

The quoting of poetry in historical narrative was an extremely common practice, but it has received comparatively little attention from scholars so far. Geert Jan van Gelder has devoted two articles to the functions of poetry in "post-classical" historical contexts, observing that "poetry reflects on history, occasionally it is part of history, and it is an almost indispensable part of historiography" and that "it is valuable in that it shows how the events were interpreted by contemporaries and later generations".[71] In an earlier article he referred to Wolfhart Heinrichs' distinction between two ideal types of poetry that also appear in historical narrative: "action poems" and "commentary poems", the first of which serves to drive the action forward, while the second comments upon the events related in the prose parts of the text. However, van Gelder notes that the distinction between the two is not always clear and that they tend to bleed into each other.[72] One may add to this that while it is quite a useful descriptive distinction, its analytical potential is in fact rather limited. It may thus be best to work, as van Gelder himself does, on the poetical examples and the ways in which they interact with their prose contexts themselves without resorting too much to the distinction as an analytical tool.

Table 4 on the next page shows that the amount of poetry quoted per text is quite variable, as is the length of the poems quoted. In sheer numbers, *al-Rawḍ al-zāhir* is by far the most poetry-laden text, although the great majority of the poetry consist of epigrams, with an especially large number of one-liners. I have added one extra poem to the text which does not survive in the two defective manuscripts of *Rawḍ,* but which was very probably a part of the original text: it appears in abridged form in Shāfiʿ b. ʿAlī's *Ḥusn al-manāqib* (22 lines) and (presumably) in full in ʿIzz al-Dīn b. Shaddād's *Tārīkh al-Malik al-Ẓāhir* (77 lines) as well as as in other texts (see the long first footnote in my introduction to Chapter Four above). The other texts contain only a few such short poems, but have similar amounts of long poems. Shāfiʿ's penchant for *qaṣīda*'s of 36 to 37 lines, of which he wrote four (one, a felicitation for the conquest of Acre, is reproduced in two of his texts), is remarkable, especially since neither his uncle nor other contemporary poets were especially devoted to that specific length. Only very few poets are explicitly named as authors. As I will show below, some of these lines were written

journey. The section is highly narrative and thus suggests that Ibn ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir reworked the letter into historiography. However, as far as I am aware, here too the original letter does not survive. *Tashrīf,* 112-114.

[71] Van Gelder, "Poetry in Historiography: The Case of *al-Fakhrī* by Ibn al-Ṭiqṭaqā", in *Poetry and History: The Value of Poetry in Reconstructing Arab History,* eds. R. Baalbaki, S. Said Agha, & T. Khalidi (Beirut: AUB Press, 2011), 73.

[72] Van Gelder "Poetry in Historiography: Some Observations"in *Problems in Arabic Literature*, ed. Miklós Maróth (Piliscsaba, 2004), 5-6. See Heinrichs, "Prosimetrical Genres in Classical Arabic Literature", in *Prosimetrum: Cross-Cultural Perspectives on Narrative in Prose and Verse* (Cambridge, 1997), 249-275.

by very well known poets and were perhaps for that reason not explicitly linked to their author, but many more lines were probably not attributed because they must have been self-written. In the case of *al-Alṭāf al-khafiyya,* which includes a relatively high amount of long poems compared to an only limited amount of epigrams, I believe it is very likely that the majority if not all of its poetic material was written by the author himself.

Number of lines	al-Rawḍ al-zāhir	Tashrīf al-ayyām	al-Alṭāf al-khafiyya	al-Faḍl al-maʾthūr	Ḥusn al-manāqib	Sīrat al-Malik al-Nāṣir
1	34	1	1	2	3	2
2	22	1		3	2	2
3	5	1	2	1	1	
4	9	1			2	
5	3	1	1		2	
6	2		1			
8	2	1			2	
9-20	5	2	6	1	6	
21-30	2	3	3		1	
36-37				3	1	1
48-60		1		2	1	
77	(1)					
Authorship self-attributed	2	4	None	5	3	2

Table 4: length of poetical excerpts per *sīra*[73]

Alhough our authors did not introduce innovative uses of poetry in historical narrative, they did show significant authorial agency in doing so. The clearest example of this is doubtlessly the position of self-written poetry: where historians routinely quoted poetry composed for specific occasions (in several such instances, other historians quote poetry written by one or both of our authors),[74] our authors would do so too but ultimately stressed the self-written poetry, the performative quality of which is of course self-evident. While both our authors are keen to include their own poetry, Ibn ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir also goes beyond this practice and makes the quoting of other persons' poetry an area of significant authorial agency as well. This is much less visible in the

[73] Texts grouped by author: the three on the left by Ibn ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir, the three on the right by Shāfiʿ.
[74] For examples of Shāfiʿ being quoted respectively by a semi-contemporary and a later historian: Ibn al-Dawādārī, *Kanz al-durar,* 9:190; al-ʿAynī, *ʿIqd al-jumān,* vol. 5:164, 316, 317.

works of his nephew, so I will focus on the elder's use of poetry in the remainder of this section.

One particularly interesting example of what Thomas Bauer has called "shared intertextuality" is found in Ibn ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir's *Tashrīf al-ayyām,*[75] where a section on Qalāwūn's conquest of Marqab is presented as one of the crowning achievements of his sultanate.[76] The prose description of the historical events is followed by a number of poems and a prose piece written on the occasion and a short section with historical accounts (*akhbār*) about this castle. Ibn ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir starts off his poetical section with a self-written praise poem in which the sultanic excellence of the preceding prose section is amplified by such lines as "[it is] a castle of great fortune, about which no thing is written in the *sīra* of who pursued it before you".[77] Following this poem, our author includes five lines from a poem written by an unnamed poet who wrote a reply to the sultan's good tidings (*fī jawābu l-bishārati*) in name of Qalāwūn's son al-Ashraf Khalīl, but then Ibn ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir adds the following comment:

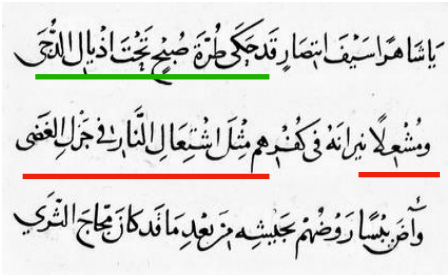
ورأيت قد وقع في مقصورة ابن دريد قوله:
ومرقب مخلولق أرجاؤه مستصعب الآفاق وعر المرتقى
فاهتدمت جملة من مقصورة ابن دريد ونقلتها إلى مدح مولانا السلطان وكان بها أحق وهي

> I saw that [the following] phrase had been inspired by Ibn Durayd's *Maqṣūra*:
>
> *And beautiful Marqab, begetting it*
> *would be a difficult distant land and a disgraceful ascent*
>
> So I extrapolated a sentence of Ibn Durayd's *Maqṣūra* and relocated it to a panegyric of our lord the sultan, for there it was more proper.[78]

Ibn ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir picked up on an intertextual reference — it should be noted that *ihtidām* actually has a connotation of plagiarism[79] — to the famous poem *Qaṣīdat al-maqṣūra,* written by the tenth-century poet Ibn Durayd, and so named because of its

[75] Bauer, "Mamluk Literature as a Means of Communication", 36-39.
[76] This part has been translated in F. Gabrieli, *Arab Historians of the Crusades*, transl. E.J. Costello (London: Routledge, 2010), 199-202.
[77] *Tashrīf,* 82.
حِصن عظيم القدر في سيرة لمن مضى قبلك لم يُكتب
[78] *Tashrīf,* 83.
[79] See however for the problematics of "plagiarism" and "intertextuality" in Arabic rhetorics, Bauer, "Arabische Kultur", in *Historische Wörterbuch der Rhetorik*, 119. See also the editors' comment in *Tashrīf,* 83 n. 1.

end-rhyme on the *alif maqṣūra,* in the poem sent by the unnamed poet.[80] The line is indeed highly similar to a line from the latter part of the *maqsūra*: it in fact only differs from the version of the poem I have found in its use of *al-āfāq* instead of *al-aqdhāf* — both have similar meanings of distant lands — in the second hemistych.[81] In any case, it is clear that the association triggered Ibn ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir's creativity, for he next produces an entirely new 23-line poem, parts of which are indeed highly similar to the *Maqṣūra* in phrasing and wording, as the first three lines from both poems testify — I have highlighted those parts in the *maqṣūra* (on the right) which are similar or identical to parts in Ibn ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir's *qaṣīda* (on the left, reproduced directly from the manuscript):[82]



يـا ظَبيَـةً أَشبَـه شَـيءٍ بِالمَهـا ... تَرعى الخُزامى بَينَ أَشجـارِ النَقـا

إِمّا تَـرَي رَأسِـيَ حاكـي لَونُـهُ ... طُرَّةَ صُبحٍ تَحـتَ أَذيـالِ الدُجى

وَاِشتَعَـلَ المُبيَـضُّ فـي مُسـوَدِّهِ ... مِثلَ اِشتِعالِ النارِ في جَزلِ الغَضـى

We know from manuscript survival and a relative abundance of commentaries that Ibn Durayd's poem was a mainstay of literary culture at the time of Ibn ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir's writing, and we even know that Shāfiʿ also quoted a line from the poem in *Ḥusn al-manāqib* after mentioning the conquest of Qarqīsiyā, a castle earlier known (and also referenced in the *Maqṣūra*) as al-Zabbāʾ.[83] It is thus not surprising to see two poets engaging in literary communication with this classic text, but it is perhaps remarkable to see this in the context of a *sīra* devoted to the actions of a sultan. While all the quoted poems are relevant to the topic of praise for the sultan's military achievement at Marqab, Ibn ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir creates a literary dynamic by which the focus is shifted to the poetry and the intertextual communication itself. The topic of that poetry becomes almost secondary to the ways in which its authors participate in practices of literary communication. It furthermore puts the literary focus almost entirely on Ibn ʿAbd al-

[80] According to M.G. Carter the *maqṣūra* is "a pedagogical poem about words", "Ibn Durayd", in *Encyclopedia of Arabic Literature vol. 1*, eds. J.S. Meisami & P. Starkey (London: Routledge, 1998), 322. This is a rather lazy evaluation, as the poem is actually essentially a eulogy. Its dense rhetorical and stylistic register probably explains its "pedagogical" popularity among later *udabāʾ*.

[81] It is thus also possible to read Ibn ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir's first comment as: "I saw that he had been inspired by the [following] phrase from Ibn Durayd's *Maqṣūra*". It remains unclear whether this line was part of the poem sent in the name of al-Ashraf Khalīl, or only that Ibn ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir noted an inspiration, which I do not clearly detect in the lines quoted above the comment, aside from a tendency to end on *alif maqṣūra.*

[82] BnF Arabe 1705, 163v; Ibn Durayd, *al-Maqṣūra,* in https://ar.wikipedia.org/wiki/مقصورة_ابن_دريد

[83] *Ḥusn al-manāqib,* 207. The 42nd line of the *Maqṣūra.*

Ẓāhir who elaborately performs his knowledge of and ability to refract the full weight of the Arabic poetical tradition to the detriment of his unnamed opponent.

The above noted poetry is part of a specific subsection devoted to poetry, but we also find a great deal of short and medium-length verse quoted throughout the historical narratives. The interweaving of prose and poetry, especially as derived from the established canon of Arabic poetry, is in fact one of the distinguishing aspects of *inshāʾ* writing and it is clear that this practice also influenced historiography of the Middle Period. Both our authors regularly insert lines by such famous poets as Imrūʾ al-Qays (d. 544 AD), Ṣaḥib al-Zanj (ʿAlī b. Muḥammad, d. 270 / 883), al-Buḥturī (d. 284 / 897), al-Qāḍī l-Fāḍil (d. 596 / 1200), and several others in their accounts — it is perhaps notable that while Ibn ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir has a penchant to quote these "superstars" of Arabic poetry, Shāfiʿ more often quotes slightly more obscure poets. By far the most quoted poet by our authors is al-Mutanabbī (d. 354 / 965): Ibn ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir quotes him at least fifteen times in *al-Rawḍ al-zāhir* and once in *al-Alṭāf al-khāfiyya,* and Shāfiʿ also quotes him once in his *sīra* of al-Nāṣir Muḥammad — notably, Shāfiʿ excises the majority of Ibn ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir's quotes in *Ḥusn al-manāqib.*[84] These quoted lines serve a variety of textual functions, but usually they will stress a certain point in the narrative, either by direct textual association, or by contextual knowledge of the original poem's origins, meanings or interpretations which would be deciphered by the attentive reader.

One of the most interesting sections in which poetry takes a prominent place is the earlier noted section dealing with Baybars' Anatolian campaign for which we have both the probable earlier and later versions found in al-Qalqashandī and Ibn ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir's *al-Rawḍ al-zāhir*.[85] This section contains by far the most sustained use of poetry as an integral, almost choral textual element in our corpus, with twenty four poems pervading the narrative. Of these, Ibn ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir only explicitly ascribes four to specific authors: three to al-Mutanabbī and the remaining one to Imrūʾ al-Qays. I could identify eight more of these poetical units as written by al-Mutanabbī, but the majority of quoted poetry remains unidentified. Often our author will only mention something along the lines of "as the poet said" (*ka-mā qāla l-shāʿir*).[86] None of this poetry appears in

[84] Shāfiʿ does claim to have authored a work – likely a commentary -- on al-Mutanabbī's poetry entitled "*al-Ishʿār bi-mā li-l- Mutanabbī min al-ashʿār*", that is "The notification about al-Mutanabbī's poems". Al-Ṣafadī, *Aʿyān al-aṣr*, 2:507. I am not aware of any manuscript copies of this work surviving.

[85] Anne Troadec has devoted some attention to this section and sees it as typical for the way Cilicia is represented in writing of the period, in which the Armenians are associated with the Byzantines of bygone eras, and the land as a place where the sultan could deploy his image as "sultan de guerre". She does not discuss the parallel text, nor does she devote much attention to the use of poetry. Troadec, "Les Mamelouks dans l'espace syrien", 140-143.

[86] *Rawḍ*, 58, 70, 110, 191, 212, 264 (followed by a self-written poem), 270.

his *dīwān* and, as noted, Shāfiʿ's abridgement of this section is extremely brief and excises all the poetry.[87]

The choice for al-Mutanabbī was not random or only inspired by the poet's undeniable stature as one of the greatest panegyric poets of Arabic literature,[88] but has a contextual logic. Al-Mutanabbī served for nine years as court poet to Sayf al-Dawla (d. 356 / 967), the Ḥamdanid ruler of Aleppo who fought regularly against a resurgent Byzantine empire in eastern Asia Minor. For al-Mutanabbī these were his most fruitful years during which he wrote his most celebrated panegyric poetry.[89] Much of this poetry deals with Sayf al-Dawla's campaigns and contains a variety of images related to specific places and events in the very same region where our author and his sultan campaigned. It was the ideal place for Ibn ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir to look for appropriate imagery and phrases to use in his own narrative.[90]

The multifaceted narrative's association between al-Mutanabbī's verses on Sayf al-Dawla's Anatolian campaigns and Baybars' military achievements in the same area may be seen as communicating several ideas. Most central perhaps is Ibn ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir's earlier noted project of equating Baybars with near-mythical rulers of the distant past. In the section on the Anatolian compain, Ibn ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir also arguably constructed such a historicising narrative: Baybars started out from Aleppo to fight the Armenians and the Mongols, just as Sayf al-Dawla famously started out from the same city to fight the Byzantines in more or less the same territory. However, as elsewhere in the *sīra*, Baybars is portrayed as actually excelling the invoked ruler. Upon conquering Kayseri, Baybars is seated upon the Saljuq throne in the "House of the Sultanate" (*dār al-salṭana*). Ibn ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir concludes in *sajʿ*:

ونال التخت بحلوله أعظم بخت * فجلس في مرتبة السلطنة في أسعد وقت *

> [The Sultan] sat on the highest point of the Sultanate at the happiest of moments, and he conferred the throne the greatest felicity by his alighting.[91]

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[87] The *dīwān* generally contains no poetry quoted by Ibn ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir in his *sīra*'s. *Ḥusn,* 333-335.

[88] Al-Qāḍī l-Fāḍil for example also quoted from al-Mutanabbī's praise poetry to Sayf al-Dawla while addressing Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn for similar ends. E. Sivan, *L'Islam et la croisade: Idéologie et Propaganda dans les Réactions Musulmanes aux Croisades* (Paris: Librairie d'Amérique et d'Orient, 1968), 109.

[89] J.S. Meisami, "al-Mutanabbī", in *EAL* vol. 2:559. For a detailed literary discussion of all the poems written during this period, see: A. Hamori, *The Composition of al-Mutanabbi's Panegyrics to Sayf al-Dawla* (Leiden: Brill, 1992).

[90] Sayf al-Dawla himself sometimes shows up as an example in political advice literature, such as in the mirror for princes written by Ibn Nubāta l-Miṣrī, as referenced in Syrinx Von Hees, "*The Guidance for Kingdoms",* 374.

[91] *Rawḍ*, 466. *Martaba* may also literally mean "seat" here, but the connotation of a high summit with a vantage point is very strong. This episode is one of the few from the campaign which survive in Shāfiʿ's brief account, and is regularly referred to by other historians as well. It is also one of the few instances in which ʿIzz al-Dīn b. Shaddād resorts to *sajʿ* in the main annalistic section of *Tārīkh al-Malik al-Ẓāhir*, 176. The much later historian

Immediately following this statement, Ibn ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir includes an epigram, the first line of which contains the phrase "*al-malīk al-ẓāhir*", that is, presumably, al-Malik al-Ẓāhir Baybars, so we are very likely dealing with a self-written poem here. While at first sight it seems to says that the throne had not been suitable for anyone but Baybars, who thus excels all other rulers who sat on it before him (see 5.3.3.), the epigram may also communicate another idea as well by way of our author's choice for the more seldomly used form "*malīk*", which more literally means "possessor".[92] Interestingly, in such a reading "*ẓāhir*" ("manifest", "apparent", but also more literally "outward appearance") may obliquely claim that the sultan was not a "king manifest" but a "possessor" of the throne only in the literal sense of the word, i.e. in appearance only. There is no claim about the time when this poem was written, and it may have been composed only after Baybars had already returned from Anatolia, when his conquest of Kayseri and nominal taking up of the Seljuq throne was quickly made undone, not in the least by the sultan's own death.[93] The fact that the sultan is immediately after also described as "*al-nadb*", which has a number of meanings related to "appointment", "mandate", "ingenious",[94] as well as "lamentation" and "weeping", also draws the verse firmly into the domain of ambiguity.

The possible use of *tawriyya* ("double entendre") in this poem thus highlights the strong rhetorical qualities of this section,[95] and the ambiguous ways in which Ibn ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir composed it at a moment when Baybars was already on the retreat from his Anatolian campaign, which may at the time already have been seen as mostly a symbolic undertaking. It also subtly takes the equation of Baybars' actions to Sayf al-Dawla's beyond the merely glorious actions, for Sayf al-Dawla's later years were also marred by military defeat, the temporary loss of Aleppo, and eventually even being a tributary to the Byzantines.[96]

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al-Suyūṭī (d. 911 / 1505) mentions it as one of the prime achievements of Baybars: *Ḥusn al-Muḥāḍara*, ed. Muḥammad Abū l-Faḍl Ibrāhīm (Aleppo: Dār iḥyā al-kutub al-ʿarabiyya, 1968), 2:96.

[92] The poem appears in identical form in al-Qalqashandī, *Ṣubḥ,* 14:155.

وما كان هذا التخت من حين نصب لغير المليك الظاهر يصل الندب

Translated in Khuwayṭir, *Translation*, 864 as "Since it was erected this throne had not been suitable for any but the active king al-Ẓāhir."

[93] The fact that Shāfiʿ refers to this episode as a "*ghazwa*" (raid) and not a "*fatḥ*" (conquest) is telling in that sense. *Ḥusn,* 333. If al-Qalqashandī's contextual information on the letter in which the poem appears is right, it was likely written still before the death of Baybars, but after the return to Syria.

[94] For the latter, see Lane, *An Arabic-English Lexicon,* 2779, who also describes it as "a man who, when he is sent to accomplish a great, or important, affair, finds it light to him."

[95] Ibn ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir was well versed in the art of *tawriyya,* as four centuries after his death ʿAbd al-Ghanī al-Nābulusī (d. 1731) used an example of his to illustrate the working of this poetic technique. Cachia, *The Arch Rhetorician,* 72. However, Cachia or perhaps al-Nābulusī himself mistakenly transcribes the name as Ibn ʿAbd al-Qāhir.

[96] H. Kennedy, *The Prophet and the Age of the Caliphates: The Islamic Near East from the 6th to the 11th Century* (London: Longman, 1986), 239-240.

However, perhaps even more fundamentally than Baybars' equation to Sayf al-Dawla is how Ibn ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir performs his position as ideal *kātib* in the narrative. For one, there is a noticeable shift in writing style in this section: Ibn ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir becomes much more prominently present in his text, often writing in the first person plural and talking about his experiences and hardships on the journey as part of the sultan's army. As noted, al-Mutanabbī too, accompanied Sayf al-Dawla on military campaigns and composed poetry for the occasion, although he did not leave behind prose reflections on these campaigns.[97] By Ibn ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir's time, however, both poetry and prose were essential to literary performance. In the above noted section on Qalāwūn's conquest of Marqab this took the form of Ibn ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir composing separate pieces of poetry and prose, but in the long section detailing the Anatolian campaign he takes a different approach. Here, he interweaves the registers and performs his duty as the sultan's ideal *kātib* and literary companion by way of a densely layered multi-focal text. Ibn ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir's opening claims (which are however only found in al-Qalqashandī's version of the text) are suggestive of his undertaking:

ولما كان المملوك قد انتظم في سلك الخدم والعبيد * وأصبح كم له قصيد في مدح هذا البيت الشريف كل بيت منها بيت القصيد * وأنّ في مآثره الرسائل التي قد شاعت * وضاعت نفحاتها في الوجود وكم رسالة غيرها في غيره ضاعت * رأى أن يتحف الخواطر الشريفة من هذه الغزوة بلُمَح يختار منها من يؤلف * ويسند اليها من يؤرخ أو يصنف * وإنما قصد أن يتحف بها أبواب مولانا مع بسط القول وإتساع كلماته * لأن الله قد شرف المملوك بعبودية مولانا "والله أعلم حيث يجعل رسالته" * فإن كان المملوك قد طوّل في المطراحة * فمولانا يتطوّل في المسامحة * وإن قال أحد هذا هذى * فما زال شرح الوقائع مطوّلاً كذا * وتالله ما ورّج مثلها في التواريخ الأول * ولعمري إن خيرًا من سيرة ذلك البطال سيرة هذا البطل * والأمر أعلى في قراءتها و استماعها *

Considering that the *mamlūk* [Ibn ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir] has been incorporated amongst the corps of servants and slaves, and a great amount of *qaṣīda*'s have been written by him in praise of this noble house with each verse being as if it were principal verse of the *qaṣīda* (*bayt al-qaṣīd*); and as letters have been circulated on the subject of his exploits, which spread their fragrances amongst the existent — and how could a letter without these fragrances spread its smell elsewhere! — [Ibn ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir] deemed it appropriate to present the noble happenings of this raid by way of a wondrous thing to behold (*lumaḥ*) from which he who compiles may choose

[97] "Al-Mutanabbi became the regular companion of Sayf al-Dawlah in battle, riding alongside his patron and fighting next to him, even in situations where professional soldiers were fleeing the field. His primary function on these occasions was to record the details of the battles and describe them in celebratory panegyrics. Whether Sayf al-Dawlah was victorious or not mattered little, and the demand for eulogistic renditions sometimes led to ridiculous exaggerations of meager, even non-existent, triumphs." Larkin, *Al-Mutanabbī*, 52-53.

> [what he finds appropriate to copy], and on which he who writes history or composes [a new work] may lean. And verily, he has aimed to present it to the gates of our lord [Bahāʾ al-Dīn b. Ḥinnā] with an exposition of statement and in adequate wordings,[98] because God honoured the *mamlūk* [Ibn ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir] by [bringing him in] the service of our lord — "and God knows to whom he should entrust His message!" And if the *mamlūk* has been long-winded in his proposition, our lord is generous in his forgiveness; and if one should say: this is that, then the expounding of happenings is unceasingly elaborate like that; for by God! in the first histories no such [happenings] have been recorded, and by my life! better than a *sīra* of such a vainglorious person (*baṭāl*) is the *sīra* of this hero (*baṭal*)![99]

We can not assess whether these lines were effectively incorporated as such into the *sīra,* as the pages on which they would have been included are missing from the Istanbul manuscript, and it may very well be that Ibn ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir excised this bit of text from the original to make it flow more naturally with the rest of the textual construction. But these claims are of course telling in relation to the later parts of the text which were definitely reused (be it literally or in different form or wording) in the *sīra.* Ibn ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir even notes explicitly that his accounts may be helpful to those compiling or writing historical accounts. The *sīra* also appears here in the last line, and less as a general category than one would think at first sight, as Ibn ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir's project of writing a *sīra* was likely already well advanced when he composed this particular part. These comments stress the importance of Ibn ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir's personal association to both the sultan and his vizier, the latter of whom he continually addresses here. Through this discourse our author effectively establishes that in the following parts of the text he will serve as an intermediary between these two prominent leaders of the sultanate. Ibn ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir is cut out for the task for he is the most adequate eulogist and historian around because of his ample experience in writing praise poems (*qaṣīd*) and letters *(rasāʾil*), which resonates in interesting ways with the *sīra*'s introductory claim that no *dawla* can exist without a chronicler, a statement that is here more or less revisited. In fact, this claim is taken one step further by our author's use of the Qurʾānic quote, by which it is implied that God himself has enabled Ibn ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir to write this text by placing the "message" (notably rendered as "*risāla*") in the most adequate hands.

This may not necessarily have any direct relation to the high amount of quotes from al-Mutanabbī, but it does highlight the ways in which Ibn ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir represented himself *vis-à-vis* Baybars in this late writing. Ibn ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir's construction of this

[98] Interestingly, *ittisāʿ fī l-kalām* also means "vagueness in expression" (Wehr, *Arabic-English Dictionary,* 1253) which resonates with the ambiguities found later on in the text.

[99] *Rawḍ*, 454-455; *Ṣubḥ,* 14:140. The quoted line is from the *Qurʾān,* 6:124.

relation to Baybars, in which he bestows a fundamental role to himself, has a fascinating parallel in al-Mutanabbī's own writings. Just as al-Mutanabbī in his panegyrics to Sayf al-Dawla constantly makes clear that only he was worthy of being the ruler's panegyrist,[100] Ibn ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir stresses his importance by way of his stylistic choice in writing the text in such an elaborate register that immediately draws attention to our author's literary dexterity. Margaret Larkin argues that:

> Al-Mutanabbi is not content just to derive riches and renown from his heroic portrayal of his patron; rather, he forces his subject to share the role of hero with him. If Sayf al-Dawlah is the savior of Islam, who boldly beats back the aggressions of the Byzantine Christians and the Bedouin Arab tribes, al-Mutanabbi is his counselor and wise guide. If Sayf al-Dawlah defies death and punishes his enemies in battle, it is the poet who interprets these acts and grasps their true significance in the grander scheme of things. If Sayf al-Dawlah is loyal, affectionate, and generous, it is al-Mutanabbi who comprehends the fleeting nature of personal attachment and appreciates the ultimately tragic nature of man's destiny. Thus virtually every eulogy of Sayf al-Dawlah is to some extent also a eulogy of the poet.[101]

Ibn ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir of course never comes near the infamous boastful attitude of al-Mutanabbī in this part, but the poetic quotes, the subject matter, and the relatively high authorial presence in the section created a web of associations and significations that would not be lost on the ideal contemporary reader who we may assume was well versed in al-Mutanabbī's poetry and the historical context in which it originated. Indeed, if we consider the fact that good letter writing interwove famous poetry and artful prose, it may very well be a large part of the reason why al-Qalqashandī thought it was a great example of a letter informing about war activities. As such, Ibn ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir's textual construction here serves both as a laudation (and perhaps veiled criticism) of Baybars as an equation of Ibn ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir himself to one of the greatest poets of the Arabic literary canon. That he also quotes Imrūʾ al-Qays in passing does not distort that image but only adds to the timeless qualities of Ibn ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir's literary performance, his revisiting and resignification of the poetic *lieux de mémoire* of eastern Anatolia.[102]

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[100] Larkin, *Al-Mutanabbī,* 40.
[101] Idem, 51-2.
[102] A similar practice of prose-poetry interaction and active connection to earlier examples is found in the section about Baybars' raid against Sīs, in which a poem by al-Buḥturī (d. 284 / 897) is followed by a plethora of unidentified (again, likely self-written) poems. *Rawḍ,* 434-438.

Compilation thus clearly served a variety of textual functions. Although the inclusion of documents and poetry in historical narratives was a mainstay of Arabic historiography, for our authors, doing so can be said to have had a profoundly performative function because it showcased their personal mastery of contemporary literary practices. Ibn ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir's interweaving of al-Mutanabbī's poetry, his own poems, and a masterfully composed historical narrative communicated to his readers his knowledge of the canon, his own poetical abilities that could vie with those of the great predecessor, and his mastery of the hybrid prose-poetry *inshāʾ* form, while at the same time constructing an imposing literary image of the sultan he was serving at the time. The fact that this text was initially sent to Baybars' vizier Bahāʾ al-Dīn b. Ḥinnā shows the multidirectionality of such a performance of Ibn ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir's abilities, first to one of his direct superiors and later to a broader audience of readers.

6.2.3 Further performative uses of compilation

Both the neatly delineated and the interwoven constructions of poetry, *inshāʾ* and historical narrative thus showcase the complexity of compilation and composition found in the *sīra's.* Sometimes, establishing the origins and authorship of certain texts is quite complex itself: as noted, some letters quoted by Ibn ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir also appear in his nephew's works and in a variety of other historiographical texts, but these letters are not always ascribed to the same authors. For example, letters which are not explicitly linked to an author in the corpus are elsewhere said to have been written by one of our authors.[103] At other times our authors disagree on who exactly wrote a certain type of text. For example, the prose description of the castle of Marqab which Ibn ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir claims to have written himself, is by Shāfiʿ ascribed to Fatḥ al-Dīn b. ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir.[104]

More peculiar is one specific type of compilatory, and as I will argue highly performative, practice found mostly in the work of Shāfiʿ, namely his habit of including several directly related texts. That is, "alternative texts" written for the exact same occasion by different authors, in which only one would have been effectively used or sent. This was in itself not an entirely unfamiliar practice: the important *inshāʾ* author and theoretician Ḍiyā al-Dīn b. al-Athīr (d. 637 / 1239) for example also quotes a prestigious self-written letter informing the Caliph in Baghdad about Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn's

[103] *Ḥusn al-manāqib* attributes two letters also included anonymously in *Rawḍ* as being written by Ibn ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir himself. *Ḥusn*, 108, 264. Shāfiʿ claims that the authorship of Qalāwūn's answer to Aḥmad Tegüder's letter is the result of a collaborative effort between Fatḥ al-Dīn b. ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir's and himself (*Faḍl,* 102), but Ibn al-Dawādārī and other authors ascribe it to Ibn ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir. Al-Qalqashandī claims it was written by Shāfiʿ (*Ṣubḥ,* vol. 7:237).
[104] *Tashrīf,* 85; *Faḍl,* 142.

victories at Ḥaṭṭīn and Jerusalem, even though it was never sent. Claude Cahen paraphrases Ibn al-Athīr's intention here as "to rival with the qāḍī al-Fāḍil".[105] But the ways in Shāfiʿ uses this practice in one of his texts is peculiar and very telling for the ways in which he embedded his own authorship within broader practices of *inshāʾ* and poetry composition.

The richest text for these practices is *al-Faḍl al-maʾthūr,* especially in the latter thematic sections where our author provides us with the following alternative texts:

- Two praise poems (*mādiḥan*) on the victory at Homs: one by Fatḥ al-Dīn b. ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir, the second by Shāfiʿ.[106]
- Three *tadhkira*'s communicating how the sultan's son should rule Egypt in the absence of Qalāwūn: one by Ibn ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir, an abridged one by Fatḥ al-Dīn b. ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir, and a last one by Shāfiʿ.[107]
- Two *inshāʾ* descriptions of Marqab: one ascribed to Fatḥ al-Dīn b. ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir, another by Shāfiʿ.[108]
- Two letters communicating the good news of the conquest of Tripoli to the ruler of Yemen: one by Tāj al-Dīn b. al-Athīr, a second by Shāfiʿ.[109]
- Two poetry *tahnīʾā*'s on the conquest of Acre: one by Ibn ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir, another by Shāfiʿ, which concludes the book.[110]

Notice that Shāfiʿ's writings are always the last in the row, which already suggests that these should not be considered as the "dominant" texts or that they were variations written as stylistic exercise, perhaps at much later dates. While it would be worthwhile to devote attention to all of these multiple texts and the ways they are interrelated, two instances are especially interesting and will be my focus for the following discussion: the *tadhkira*'s and the letters to Yemen. I will however conclude on some general observations that are also relevant for the other texts.

The *tadhkira*'s are introduced by a paragraph in which Shāfiʿ describes the occasion for writing at least the first of these texts: the sultan's departure for Syria (like most of this *sīra*'s events, not specified in time) and the transfer of governorship over Egypt to

[105] C. Cahen, "La Correspondance de Ḍiyā ad-Dîn ibn al-Athīr: Liste de lettres et textes de diplômes", *BSOAS* 14/1 (1952), 35.
[106] *Faḍl,* 82-85.
[107] Idem, 118-135.
[108] Idem, 142-144. As noted, the text here ascribed to Fatḥ al-Dīn is also claimed to have been written by Ibn ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir himself in *Tashrīf,* 85.
[109] *Faḍl,* 150-160.
[110] Idem, 178-183.

this son al-Ṣālīh.[111] Shortly before his departure, Qalāwūn is said to have commanded the writing of a *tadhkira* which would detail these tasks.[112] Two scholars have translated and studied the contents of these *tadhkira*'s, but neither has really pondered the reasons for including them in the *sīra* — although Paulina Lewicka argues this and other pieces were primarily included "to display the rhetorical skill of [Shāfiʿ] and his kinsmen".[113] In fact, a first observation already problematises that statement to some extent: while Ibn ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir's and Shāfiʿ's *tadhkira*'s are given in full, Fatḥ al-Dīn's is presented in abridged form. Shāfiʿ introduces his cousin's *tadhkira* as written "on the occasion of another journey [of the sultan]" (*fī safratin ukhrā*), but concludes it with the following statement, which I have copied from the manuscript, as both editions are somewhat problematic:

> This is the summary (*mulakhkhaṣ*) of the sections of this *tadhkira,* which are many and long (*kathīra ṭawīla*),[114] and there is sufficiency in what we have mentioned (*fī-mā dhakarnā-hu maqnaʿ*).[115]

The statement is already remarkable considering the considerable length of both Ibn ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir's and Shāfiʿ's own *tadhkira*'s. Fatḥ al-Dīn's *tadhkira* was apparently relatively unimportant to Shāfiʿ, despite it being equally relevant to the topic and as

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[111] Interestingly, it is said that his brother al-Ashraf Khalīl was "forbidden to vie with his brother" and had to accompany him (*yalzam maʿa-hu*) in his governing tasks.

[112] *Faḍl,* 118. See also A. Moberg, "Regierungspromemoria eines Ägyptischen Sultans" in *Festschrift Edward Sachau zum siebzigsten Geburtstage gewidmet von Freunden und Schülern,* ed. G. Weil (Berlin: Georg Kremer, 1915), 408. Moberg claims that Ibn ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir stayed in Cairo during this trip, while Shāfiʿ and Fatḥ al-Dīn accompanied Qalāwūn to Syria.

[113] Moberg, "Regierungspromemoria" (edition and translation of Ibn ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir's *tadhkira*); P. Lewicka, "What a King Should Care About: Two Memoranda of the Mamluk Sultan on Running the State's Affairs", *Studia Arabistyczne i Isamistyczne* 6 (1998), 5-45 (edition and translation of the two other *tadhākir*). For a later *tadhkira* written by Ibn al-Mukarram, see: L. Fernandes, "On Conducting the Affairs of the State: A Guideline of the Fourteenth Century", *Annales Islamologiques* 24 (1988), 81-91.

[114] The manuscript would suggests rather *kurra, karra,* or maybe even *kibra, kubra,* or *kabra,* but none of these options seem to make sense here. Tadmurī reads "*kathīra ṭawīla*", *Faḍl,* 127; Lewicka reads "*kabīra ṭawīla*", 355. Both readings suppose that the copyist did not dot his letters here, while he does do so for most of the text. The line just above undoubtedly contains the word "*kabīr*" written very differently and including all the dots. The immediately following word *ṭawīla* also comprises all necessary dots (except those of the *ṭāʾ marbūṭa,* which are routinely not written in the manuscript). I am more inclined to follow Tadmurī's choice, judging from common colloquial use of such constructions with "*kathīr(a)*" in Shāmī dialects, some aspects of which surface elsewhere occasionally in Shāfiʿ's language use.

[115] Bodleian Marsh 424, 92r-v.

eloquent as the two other texts. Why Shāfiʿ did not leave the text out entirely then remains unclear, but it does resonate in interesting ways with the two praise texts on the Battle of Homs written by Shāfiʿ and Fatḥ al-Dīn – again, why include two when he might as well simply have recorded his own? – and some general comments about their relationship found in the rest of the text which have made P.M. Holt conclude that Shāfiʿ had "little affection" for his family members "even if he showed them formal respect".[116]

While it is perfectly possible that all three of these *tadhkira*'s were indeed written and presented to courtly officers, at other instances Shāfiʿ's actual position at court is highly unclear, especially in the context of his accounts about al-Nāṣir Muḥammad. At some points he evades such a problematic situation by using flash-forwards, as he does in *Ḥusn al-manāqib*, where his own experiences in the *dīwān* in the context of dealings with Frankish lordships during Qalāwūn's reign are given as excursions from the general narrative about such dealings at the time of Baybars' sultanate, during which Shāfiʿ most certainly did not enjoy a position of much note as *kātib*. By a relevant digression, Shāfiʿ is as such able to involve himself in the narrative construction. We have also seen above that the caliphal *taqlīd* written for al-Nāṣir Muḥammad's third ascension of the throne also communicated competitive practices between Shāfiʿ and ʿAlāʾ al-Dīn b. ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir. The recording of three *tadhkira*'s in this context may thus also be seen within an intention to closely associate the author with two leading *kuttāb,* showcasing by way of his text that he was equally worthy, or indeed, considering the abridging of his cousin's text, *more* worthy of being a leading *kātib,* possibly at a point when he did not enjoy such a relation to the chancery anymore.

While Shāfiʿ thus positions himself personally *vis-à-vis* his relatives, he also does so in relation to other agents. Also in *al-Faḍl al-maʾthūr* we find two different letters written to be sent to Yemen to communicate the good news of the conquest of Tripoli. The first is written by the well known *kātib* Tāj al-Dīn b. al-Athīr and is introduced as:

> وفي فتحها ما كتب الصدر الفاضل البليغ البارع تاج الدين أحمد بن سعيد المعروف بإبن الأثير الكاتب الحلبي وهو الكاتب الذي لا يُباري قلمه * ولا يضاهي كَلِمه * ولا يكمل كاتب لإلاقة دواته * ولا لمعارضة أدواته * كتب مُهَنِّيًا بفتحها للملك المظفر شمس الدين صاحب اليمن كتابًا وهو

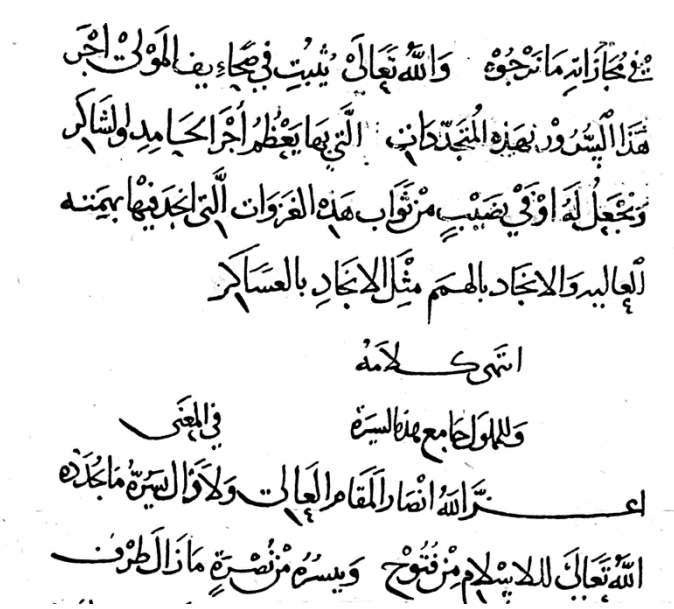
> And about the conquest [of Tripoli] there is what was written by the honourable, outstanding, eloquent, brilliant Tāj al-Dīn Aḥmad b. Saʿīd, known as Ibn al-Athīr, the *kātib* from Aleppo, and he is the *kātib* whose pen cannot be vied with, and whose words can not be imitated, and no *kātib* can reach the lightning[117] of his

[116] Holt, "A Chancery Clerk", 678.
[117] The word *ilāq* also has a strong connotation of "lying" and "deceit", however, so the statement may be intentionally ambiguous.

> inkwell, nor [could he reach] a remonstration of his utensils. He wrote the following letter in felicitation of its conquest to al-Malik al-Muẓaffar Shams al-Dīn, lord of the Yemen.[118]

We have earlier come across Shāfiʿ's relationship to Tāj al-Dīn b. al-Athīr as a rather complex one (see 3.1.), as a later author records a fragment in which our author apparently "opposed" a writing of the older *kātib*.[119] Apart from this one letter Tāj al-Dīn b. al-Athīr does not appear again in Shāfiʿ's own writings.[120] From the introduction to this letter it is however already clear that Shāfiʿ's relationship to him was different than to this relatives. For one, there is no stress on a specific personal relationship: rather, Ibn al-Athīr is merely named as an excellent *kātib,* although the praise of his writing can in at least one instance be read subversively. As Tadmurī notes, Ibn al-Athīr's letter is attested in other historical writings with some word variation.[121] Shāfiʿ's own following letter is however only found in the *sīra,* which triggers Tadmurī to repeat the typical evaluation that this type of unique material gives the work its "importance" (*ahammiyya*).[122]

[118] *Faḍl,* 149-150. The edition contains an omission (it omits *lā* before *yubārī,* which would make the statement rather strange) which I have corrected based on MS Marsh 424, 109v.
[119] As noted above, al-ʿUmarī quotes a few lines from an offering of Shāfiʿ to Tāj al-Dīn b. al-Athīr. *Masālik,* 19:225.
[120] He *is* mentioned by ʿIzz al-Dīn b. Shaddād as having joined the central *dīwān al-inshāʾ* during the reign of Baybars, where it is noted that he had been active in Damascus in the *dīwān* of al-Nāṣir Yūsuf. Ibn Shaddād, *Tārīkh al-Malik al-Ẓāhir,* 239. (See above)
[121] The editor notes text variation, but on actually comparing the letter as quoted in al--ʿUmarī, *Masālik al-abṣār* 12:268-269, the variation is a lot more significant, with several lines being unique to *Faḍl* and quite a bit of variation in phrases, especially in the opening sections which are entirely different. This would suggest that either Shāfiʿ or al-ʿUmarī reworked the letter when including it in their texts or they had access only to a reworked version of it.
[122] See n. 10 in *Faḍl,* 160.



Aside from those observations, it is worthwhile to look more closely at the letter's specific textual position in the manuscript reproduced on this page: after the last lines of Ibn al-Athīr's piece we read "*intahā kalāma-hu*" ("[here] ends his speech"), followed on the next line by "*wa-li-l-mamlūki jāmiʿu hādhihi l-sīrati*", that is, "and by the servant, the compiler of this *sīra*", and then clearly distinguished from the prior statement on the left side of the page, "*fī l-maʿnā*".[123] This last part is less straightforward to translate: *maʿnā* has a basic meaning of "meaning", but it could also be used as a form to denote "similarly".[124] However, the specific page position suggests that it is used here to denote a formal characteristic of the text, meaning something along the lines of, "as an example of *maʿnā*". In fact, when we talk about Arabic rhetorics, we usually do not refer to one cohesive "science" (*ʿilm*), but to a conglomerate of overlapping sciences such as *ʿilm al-balāgha* ("eloquence", but more literally, "clearness in expression"), *ʿilm al-bayān* ("clarification"), *ʿilm al-badīʿ* ("stylistics"), and not in the least, *ʿilm al-maʿānī* ("meanings").[125] As such, Shāfiʿ was referring here not only to a rhetorical practice intimately concerned with meaning, but he also quite literally meant a *type* of writing. As Adrian Gully notes:

> The Arabic word for 'theme' normally used in the sources is *maʿnā*, probably one of the most loaded, versatile, and significant terms in pre-modern Arabic discourse. Aside from its more general sense of 'meaning' – a term that in itself requires careful reflection – it carries the sense of 'idea', 'motif' or 'concept', all of which are related to the sense of theme. The relationship between idea and theme becomes clear when we examine more closely the unity of the text in a given epistle or even in an example of poetry. The composite structure of a letter is based on the fundamental premise that the main theme should be set by the

[123] MS Marsh 424, 113r. The edition misleadingly renders these two parts as one sentence. In *Ḥusn* Shāfiʿ refers to a poem by Ibn ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir as "*fī maʿnā ḥajji-hi*", 299.
[124] See Wehr, *Arabic-English Dictionary,* 762.
[125] Bauer, "Arabische Kultur", 111ff. Bauer does not initially mention *maʿānī* in his basic definition, but discusses the practice further on. See also, R. Gould, "Inimitability versus Translatability", *The Translator,* 19/1 (2013), 81-104.

> author in the introductory element (the salutation), and then developed appropriately. Thus the structure of an epistle is made up of several integral components, but all based around one central theme, or idea.[126]

Gully returns to the term a number of times throughout his book, highlighting myriad ways in which it was used by authors to talk about the communicative contents of a text. Shāfiʿ's use of the term may as such be interpreted as communicating that his text was intended to participate in the previous letter's "meaning": Tāj al-Dīn b. al-Athīr's letter communicated the initial "meaning" of the conquest of Tripoli to a foreign ruler, and Shāfiʿ took the opportunity to write a similar text, perhaps in an effort to vie with this letter, which seems to have been the one that was sent officially. And indeed, if we compare the contents of the two texts, it may be observed that both share a number of motifs and (perhaps unsurprisingly) frame the conquest of Tripoli as a victory of God and his believing helpers (*anṣār*) against the forces of unbelief (*kufr*) and a due reinstatement of Islam as the place's one true religion, by making extensive use of early Islamic imagery. As we have seen above in 6.2.1.1., this was common practice in epistolography when writing an answer to a letter: the first sender established the thematics of the correspondence with which the responder had to engage. It seems likely that Shāfiʿ understood his task here similarly and wrote his variation as a "response", engaging with the themes (*maʿnā*) selected by Tāj al-Dīn b. al-Athīr.

This seems to have been relatively common practice amongst *kuttāb,* as at least one other relevant example may be found outside of the *sīra* corpus: a *taqlīd* written for the appointment of a new head of the Jews ("*tawallā [...] riyāsat al-yahūd*") in the year 684 / 1285 by Ibn ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir as a variation of one written by the *kātib al-darj* Ibn al-Mukarram, an important contemporary of our authors who as noted may even have been the very same person as the famous lexicographer Ibn Manẓūr. Ibn al-Furāt provides both versions of the *taqlīd,* in which, interestingly, Ibn ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir's is twice as long as Ibn al-Mukarram's. Ibn ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir's is introduced as follows: "the qāḍī Muḥyī l-Dīn b. ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir composed another taqlīd in a similar way (*fī l-maʿnā*) on the [same] date".[127] However, significantly, these two texts are not recorded by Ibn ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir himself (even though it could have fit in *Tashrīf al-ayyām*'s chronological scope), but by an unnamed other historian whose text Ibn al-Furāt must have used (see 7.2.1.2. for a broader discussion of the relation between Ibn al-Furāt and our authors). This is quite possibly Ibn al-Mukarram himself, as the latter wrote a chancery manual that was

[126] Gully, *The Culture of Letter-writing,* 8.

[127] Ibn al-Furāt, *Tārīkh Ibn al-Furāt, volume 8,* ed. Q. Zurayq & N. ʿIzz al-Dīn (Beirut: al-Maṭbaʿa al-Amīrikāniyya, 1939), 19 (whole range of both *taqālīd,* 18-21).
وانشاء القاضي محيي الدين ابن عبد الظاهر تقليدًا اخر في المعنى التاريخ

used as an important source not only by Ibn al-Furāt but also by al-Qalqashandī.[128] Yet the context of a chancery manual is quite different from that of a historiographical text: in the former the focus is entirely on examples of good style and the use of apposite formulae. In such a context, the use of such parallel texts is not so much performative, as illustrative of broad literary engagements between *kuttāb*.

While it makes a lot of sense in a scribal manual, including such a variation text seems to have little relevance from a historiographical perspective — defined narrowly as informing a reader about what happened or even more broadly as informing the reader about a text that was sent to a foreign ruler as part of diplomatic history. Although the generally somewhat atypical historian Ibn al-Furāt of course seems to have thought otherwise, the only way in which such a sampling of closely related texts may be seen as relevant is from the perspective of a reader or an intended audience of a *kātib* or one specifically interested in the practices of *inshāʾ* writing: i.e. in the context of a scribal manual, or in a historiographical text specifically geared towards an audience of *kuttāb.* In other words, Shāfiʿ's inclusion of parallel texts is mostly meaningful through a lens of performative practice, as Shāfiʿ showing he could write a similarly eloquent letter communicating the same "meaning" in different words to a reader who would be interested in such practices. As is true with the *tadhkira*'s, this letter was meant to perform Shāfiʿ's claims to being an excellent *kātib* while also providing relevant context within which the reader may compare and evaluate this claim. Similar ideas may be seen behind the inclusion of various different poems: Shāfiʿ in these instances as it were invited his readers to compare the texts and to decide for themselves which was most successful in conveying the relevant *meaning*.

It is possible that other letters included by Shāfiʿ in his writings functioned along similar lines. One example is a letter supposedly sent to Yemen and included in the *sīra* of al-Nāṣir Muḥammad at a time when our author's position in the chancery is highly doubtful. Like the caliphal *taqlīd* included in this *sīra*, this letter is not recorded elsewhere, but it did certainly adhere to the formalities of letters written to Yemen in this period: al-Qalqashandī records several examples of such letters which all start out along similar lines.[129] Did our author compose it as a variation on the "meaning" of another such letter? Perhaps one written by his nephew ʿAlāʾ al-Dīn b. ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir who was at the time an important agent in the chancery? Without the comparative evidence he provides in *al-Faḍl al-maʾthūr* it is difficult to ascertain this hypothesis, but one is inclined to see these writings, as well as the various poems found in the texts, and indeed the *sīra*'s as general textual constructions in a similar light. The best example of this practice is of course *Ḥusn al-manāqib* itself, a large scale "variation" in the form of an

[128] Northrup, *From Slave to Sultan,* 36-37.
[129] *Ṣubḥ al-aʿshā*, 7:352ff.

abridgement of his uncle's initial text, in which our author regularly intervenes to signpost his personal participation in the text's discourse.

Conclusion

The *sīra*'s written by our authors included a good deal of compiled material, but that does not make them mere letter or poetry collections: the above sections have made clear how these texts of various kinds were all meaningfully integrated in their new contexts. This was mostly the case by an interaction between the narrative contexts and the compiled texts, or by reworking the original texts to function within the *sīra*. But on a broader level, these compiled texts may also be argued to function within the logic of what I presented in 6.1.2., in which I suggested that our authors made use of particular language as a performance of their distinction in broader society, as showcasing their command of a restricted domain of linguistic expression to prove their social preeminence. Similarly, the compiled texts were meant to showcase the authors' talents in their specific professional domain. This resonates strongly with the last element of the three-pronged argument presented by our author's as the rationale for writing their *sīra*'s: the importance of the *scribe* to the sultan's *dawla*, a performative claim to necessity as it is only by the scribe's role in clearly writing them down that the sultan's achievements would survive the forgetfulness of time. The compositional elements distinguished above clearly highlight how this penetrated the entire works: it is not only present in the simple fact that the *sīra*'s were written by our authors, but also in the ways by which they wrote them and the pervasive presence of implicit (through excellent prose and poetry) and explicit (through compilation) claims of superior authorship.

Part Three: Receptions and Afterlives

Throughout the three chapters of the preceding Part Two of this dissertation, I have repeatedly argued that authors used their texts as a whole, and the specific compiled materials and integrated narrative constructions found in them, as ways to showcase their authorial agency, to performatively display their mastery of the great variety of styles of writing and even particular constructions of meaning ("*maʿnā*") an ideal *kātib* should be able to employ. The writing of *sīra* as such becomes a participative project because it implicitly invites its readers to evaluate these claims. Such an understanding of performance of course brings up the problem of audience: who exactly would need to be convinved by our authors' linguistic dexterity? Why would authors feel the need to write their texts devoted to the life and rule of a sultan in this particular way? In the sole chapter of this last part I shall suggest a different way of evaluating the evidence for patronage, which is the obvious way of interpreting these practices. It will be suggested that at least for one of the texts, the compiled material and the text as a whole may be read as a creatively constructed curriculum vitae, by which the author showed a particular intended patron that he was (still) worthy of being a leading *kātib,* despite likely not being closely linked to the highest echelons of the chancery anymore. In the remainder of the chapter, I will broaden the perspective of what we understand as audience, by using material and traditional historical critical methods to evaluate the position of our authors and their *sīra*'s after their lifetimes, both in the Middle East and in those (mostly European) places where the manuscripts of the texts eventually ended up.

Chapter 7
"The writing remains": Patronage, perceptions, and the many lives of a *sīra*

الخط يبقا زمان بعد كاتبه وكاتب الخط تحت الأرض مدفون
يا رب أغفر لعبد كان كاتبه يا قاري الخط قل بالله أمين

The handwriting remains for a time after its author
while its writer is buried under earth
Oh lord, forgive the slave that was its writer
Oh reader of the handwriting, say by God amen[1]

Readers have engaged in several ways with the *sīra*'s written by our authors. The above-quoted poem was scribbled on the penultimate folio of the single surviving manuscript of *al-Faḍl al-maʾthūr* by an early eleventh/late sixteenth century owner (we know that he owned the manuscript because of another note written by him). It is only one example of such an engagement, but its contents are an apposite introduction to this dissertation's final chapter in which I will look at the various receptions of the *sīra*'s. Admittedly, compared to our authors' verse these lines are rather pedestrian (indeed, they have been by far the easiest to translate in this dissertation) but they do express an idea that connects nicely with the afterlife of these texts by expressing the hope that the reader of either this book or, more likely, these particular lines would remember its writer who has long since died. As we have seen, our authors also explicitly framed their writings as a battle against the forgetfulness of time, as a way to ensure their version of the past's continued relevance. Such statements of course occur commonly, but they are

[1] Marsh 424 135v. The epigram was written by a certain ʿAṭāʾ al-Lāh b. al-Ḥājj Ḥasan b. al-Shaykh in mid-Shawwāl 1002 / early July 1594. See also 7.2.1.1. below.

interesting because of their implicit engagement with an audience. For how else could the past live on through text if it is not being read or reproduced in one way or another?

The last chapter of this dissertation will conclude with a discussion of the (presumed) audiences of the six *sīra*'s written by our authors and works like it. Insofar as scholars have really dealt with these questions, most have been content to interpret this from the perspective of the legitimisation narrative: authors wrote texts that communicated a glorious image of the present ruler or one of his predecessors which would serve as a form of literary propaganda, as image building for a ruler who could as such claim legitimacy towards a not very clearly defined audience (see my initial discussion in 1.2.2.). Even if we accept this interpretation to be true in broad strokes, it still leaves a lot to be desired if we want to delineate more exactly the audiences engaging with these texts: who was this propaganda communicated to? Why did the sultan's position on the throne need to be legitimised and for whom? What effect might a literary legitimisation of the sultan's glory have to deter those agents who could really challenge the position of the sultan? What direct evidence may we find in the texts that these were indeed our authors' intentions? After having critically evaluated the textual contents and the ways in which our authors participated in various ways in literary communication through them, I will now return to the larger question of legitimisation and the position of our authors and these texts especially in courtly networks.

I will start by re-evaluating the evidence that scholars have used to argue for the texts' presumed goals of legitimisation and then move on to a material analysis of the manuscripts that may be helpful in pinning down the texts' intended and effective audiences. The first section will thus revisit the question of patronage and will be broadly analytical in similar ways as the preceding chapters. The second section introduces a different approach however and applies the material approach shown in 3.3.3.1. to the corpus of this dissertation. As Paul Love has recently called it, I will "listen to the story of the manuscripts" by perusing their material aspects: their decoration and layout, and the various notes found on them, to say something about their circulation and their "social life".[2]

[2] P.M. Love, "Ecouter le conte d'un manuscrit: Penser avec une copie d'une chronique Ibadite de la bibliothèque Barouni à Djerba" *Etudes et Documents Berbères,* 35-36 (2016), 301-313. For a material approach to objects in general, see: A. Appadurai, *The Social Life of Things: Commodities in Cultural Perspective* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988).

7.1 Patronage revisited: requests, receptions, and reciprocative performance

7.1.1 Requesting sīra: on legitimisation and performance

How should we imagine our authors in relation to the sultan? Earlier scholars have imagined them standing in front of the sultan in a courtly *majlis,* a gathering of his retinue, reading out loud what he has earlier written in praise of the sultan and afterwards being commended by the ruler, rewarded for his creation by way of gifts, remuneration, and status position. It is a tempting image, especially in the context of Orientalist representations of (literary) performance in the pre-modern Islamic world, and one that is in line with how the composition and performance of panegyric poetry for rulers is traditionally evaluated.

Aside from orientalist clichés, there are of course a number of good reasons why such an evaluation has become standard in the field: one of them is the simple fact that various contemporary authors have explicitly told us that such was the way literature functioned at Islamic courts. Several works for example explicitly state in their introductions how a certain ruler or important person requested the author to write or compile a work on a specific topic, after which the author would usually claim to only have acquiesced the request upon strong insistence because of his self-presumed unworthiness for the task, a narrative that may be said to have been a topos.[3] This is not to say that rulers never actually requested authors to write texts, but that we should take any such claims with a sizable pinch of salt. In any case, none of the preserved introductions in our corpus make these specific claims of having been requested: as we have seen, they all argue for their *raison d'être* as resulting from necessity due to the authors' privileged positions as eyewitnesses and close collaborators of the sultans. That is to say, they make an internalist argument for their motives for writing a text, instead of the externalist argument of having been requested to do so.

There is thus no evidence to claim that rulers specifically requested the writing of these texts. A more likely claim would be that these texts were directly received and commended by the sultan, that they came to be in a process of oral performance upon which the authors would receive feedback. The works themselves would then only be completed after the sultan's life, because their function as running laudatory annals of the sultan's deeds did not allow them to be finished during the sultan's life. The sultan's death itself is a fitting closer to such texts, upon which they may be revised and offered

[3] Freimark, *Das Vorwort,* 36-40.

as completed *sīra*'s to one of the sultan's successors. The surviving manuscripts would as such be only the final products of writing. Indeed, the fact that a good deal of their content was the result of compilatory processes seems to support this interpretation.

Ibn ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir at one point provides some information about the composition of a high-profile letter — which is not itself quoted — which may also be suggestive about the writing of *sīra*:

> وكتب المملوك جوابه في قطع النصف في سبعين ورقة بغدادية فيها الآيات من كتاب الله تعالى وأحاديث رسول الله - صلى الله عليه وسلم - في الترغيب في الجهاد وما ورد في مصر من الأحاديث والآيات وفي قتال المشركين والإقتداء بالنبي -صلى الله عليه وسلم - في الجهاد. وفيه ذكر مواطن العبادات ومواضع الزيارة في سائر البلاد التي دُعي له فيها شيء كثير. وجمع هذا الكتاب من الترغيب والترهيب والإستمالة والإغراء والتعليم عليه وإظهار الميل اليه ووصف كثرة جنود الديار المصرية وما هي عليه وزيادة عساكرها عن المعتاد وأنها كلها موافقة في نصرة الإسلام. وقرأت الكتاب على السلطان بحضور جماعة الأمراء وهو يزيد فيه وكذلك الأتابك مملیه. ولما تكامل هذا الكتاب وتجهزت الهدية المباركة.
>
> The servant composed an answer [to the letter sent in the name of the Mongol ruler of the Golden Horde, Bereke] on seventy pages of half-size Baghdādī paper[4] on which [were written] the verses of the Book of God most high and reports about the messenger of God — may God pray for him and give him peace — inciting *jihād,* and what is mentioned in Egypt of reports and verses, as well as on the fighting of polytheists, and the imitation of the Prophet — may God pray for him and give him peace — in *jihād.* In it were also mentioned places of worship and sites of visitation across the lands where many prayers are said for Him. This letter combined incitement, intimidation, conciliation, attack, instruction, the manifestation of affection, and a description of the great amount of soldiers in the Egyptian lands and their current situation, and the exceptionality of its armies, as is usual, and how they are all in agreement with the victory of Islam. And I read the letter to the sultan in the presence of the gathered amirs, and he made additions to it, as did the *atabeg* who had dictated it. When this letter had been completed the revered presents [for the Mongol ruler] were prepared.[5]

While the letter is presented foremost as a product of our author's composition, it is also very much a collaborative project in which the sultan and the *atabeg*, one of his most prominent advisors, played an important part. Indeed, it is even claimed that the *atabeg* "dictated" the text (he is described as *mumlī-hi*), although it seems unlikely that this would have amounted to more than the general ideas to be communicated, considering

[4] On this size and type of paper, see al-Qalqashandī, *Ṣubḥ,* 6:182.
[5] *Rawḍ,* 171-172.

how Ibn ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir stresses his own role in composing the actual contents which he also enumerates in quite some detail, clearly proud of his achievement.

In how far can we see the composition of a *sīra* as a similar process? There are two mentions of (parts of) Ibn ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir's *sīra* of Baybars being read out to the sultan made by Shāfiʿ b. ʿAlī in *Ḥusn al-manāqib.* P.M. Holt has translated these excerpts and argued on the basis of them that *al-Rawḍ al-zāhir* should be seen as the sultan's "memoir",[6] or even as a "ghosted autobiography".[7] Although these two excerpts are taken from different parts of the text, they resonate on a few interesting levels and are insightful not only about the literal performance of the text, but also more generally concerning the process of writing a *sīra* — or, in this case, summarising an earlier well-known one. The first excerpt is taken from the introduction and has been dealt with before (see 4.3.2.2. for its textual context and the Arabic original):

> The situation demanded [of him] that he register of [the historical] accounts [both] the lean and the fat, and if in doing so he reiterated what he had uttered orally, [it is because] his sultan gave ear to who praises, and though he was truthful in this, he was not on oath.[8]

As I have argued above, the importance of this claim should be seen in the context of Shāfiʿ's general argumentative build-up: it is the gap which he creates to be filled in by his own endeavour of abridging the *sīra* of Baybars. This statement claims that Ibn ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir embellished the life and times of Baybars by his penchant for encomiastic discourse which Baybars is said to have appreciated, and in which "truth" was of secondary importance,[9] but this does not yet mean that Ibn ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir was actually directed to construct the sultan's legitimacy in writing. For that argument, Holt lifts another quote from *Ḥusn al-manāqib*'s concluding section:

> إذ كان رحمه الله شاملاً له بإحسانه * مبالغاً في رفعة شأنه * رافعاً من مكانه * مجزلاً مراد إمكانه * أطلعه على سره * منوهاً بترادف الخلع والأنعام من ذكره * مشيراً إليه بسنح من مهماته * معتمداً عليه في محوه وإثباته * مجزياً له عن حسنه هذه السيره بأمثاله * مصيغاً ببشاشة إستحسانه إلى أقواله * كان

[6] Holt, "The Sultan as Ideal Ruler", 134.
[7] The first to use this phrase was Peter Thorau in *The Lion of Egypt* (1987), 270. It was afterwards echoed repeatedly by Holt, first in "Qalawun's Treaty With the Latin Kingdom", 325 and then in *Early Mamluk Diplomacy*, 2.
[8] *Ḥusn al-manāqib,* 26.
[9] Interestingly, the word Shāfiʿ uses in the last sentence of the first quote is *ṣādiq,* which according to Lane means "speaking saying uttering, or telling truth, or truly, or veraciously; true in respect of speech", i.e. a word which conceptualises truth more or less as a speech act. Lane, *An Arabic-English Lexicon,* 1678. The root letters *ḥ-q-q* have a stronger and less ambiguous meaning of "truth".

السلطان - رحمه الله - إذا أكمل الجزء منها جلس وأجلسه لسماعه * وأحسن جراه بالخلع النفيسة * وما يتبعه مكافأة لإمتاعه وإبداعه

> Let it be [my uncle's] excuse – may God have mercy on him[10] – that [the sultan] engulfed him with his beneficence, exerting himself to raise his standing, exalting his importance, and giving generously his desired power; he disclosed to him his inmost secret, commending his narration [of it] by a succession of robes and gifts, pointing out to him the auspiciousness [emanating] from his important matters, depending on him for gathering it and establishing it, remunerating him for embellishing this beautiful *sīra* with exemplary tales of him, listening with a smile of approval to his accounts. When [Ibn ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir] had completed a portion of it, [the sultan] – may God have mercy on him – would take his seat, and bid him be seated so that he might hear it. He would recompense him with precious robes and so forth as a reward for the enjoyment of this remarkable creation.[11]

What is perhaps most clear from this fragment is not that the sultan told Ibn ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir what to write, but that he *rewarded* him for the act of creating the sultan's life in writing based on the information he received orally. There is even more, for it is stated that the sultan *depended* (*muʿtamidan ʿalay-hi*) on his secretary to create this literary image, which resonates of course with the third element of the three-pronged argument I discussed throughout Part Two. The situation is thus much more complex than Ibn ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir simply being told what to write, for there is a clear reciprocal relation implied here. While acknowledging that historical truth was not Ibn ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir's primary aim, Shāfiʿ explains that this should be understood within the context of the specific relation to the sultan required by his uncle's position of patronage. He does not claim that Ibn ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir altered the facts of history to *legitimise* a political position considered to be wrongfully taken, but that he embellished history because that is what was expected of a panegyrist and, presumably, also of a biographer.

As I have highlighted above, it is important to note that Shāfiʿ mentions these things in contexts where he validates his own project to abridge and update his uncle's masterwork. The first excerpt should be understood in the context of the introduction's argument, and the second immediately follows Shāfiʿ's quoting of Ibn ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir's elegy for the death of Baybars, after which the remainder of the *sīra* consists of texts written by Shāfiʿ himself: a section in *sajʿ* describing the events that took place after Baybars' death; a letter written by Shāfiʿ to Bereke Khan in name of the viceroy Badr al-

[10] This is a standard phrase used when mentioning a deceased person and has nothing to do with a supposed transgression of Ibn ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir.
[11] *Ḥusn al-manāqib*, 339. My translation is a reworking of Holt's in "The Sultan as Ideal Ruler", 134.

Dīn Baylīk al-Khazindār (the earliest text claimed to have been written by our author); and finally a letter written to al-Muẓaffar Shams al-Dīn, the ruler of Yemen, the writer of which is not named, but which likely was Shāfiʿ as well. This particular excerpt serves as a transitionary piece then: it wraps up that material which was taken from the original *sīra* on both a laudatory and critical tone and introduces that part in which the *mukhtaṣir,* the "abridger" himself, takes center stage.

For Holt, the importance of Shāfiʿ's text was that it downplayed Baybars' legitimacy, but I believe that it was in fact the specific form of presenting Baybars' life that Shāfiʿ chose to remould. Shāfiʿ's project was not about downplaying the importance of Baybars' political achievements, it was about rephrasing the specific literary ways in which his importance could be formulated. These quotes talk about the relation between Baybars and his chief *kātib*, with the *sīra* being the epitome of that relationship, the culmination of years of close service and advice in a literary work of high mastery, but one that is precisely because of that relationship flawed in the changing context of political patronage under Baybars' successors. This specific relationship was one Shāfiʿ did not enjoy towards any sultan and thus one he could move away from while adapting his uncle's writing and constructing his own epitomes. He is not so much a "revising editor" then,[12] but an author trying to make his own mark on a literary level. Did Baybars ask Ibn ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir to write a *sīra* about him then? The above-quoted excerpts do not convincingly support this idea. Rather, from Shāfiʿ's description, it would seem that the process worked in the better-studied logic of earlier periods' poetical patronage, with Ibn ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir offering a literary feat praising the sultan and Baybars encouraging him to write more, as a reciprocal negotiation of status in Baybars' household.

Although the matter may remain somewhat opaque in the case of Ibn ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir's *sīra* of Baybars due to the problematic nature of the above noted "evidence" – not to mention the fact that the text as we presently have it may not be the original *sīra* – for the other *sīra*'s we have no information whatsoever that may support their being requested or of having originated within a context of literal oral performance in courtly *majālis*. The other *sīra*'s studied here do not provide any information about having been requested. Instead, as we have seen, their introductions argue that they originated from a necessity implied by the authors' position close to the centre of power. If we wish to say something about their textual intentions more creative readings are thus necessary and we must turn to the manuscripts and later evaluations.

[12] The quoted phrase is again Holt's, "The Sultan as Ideal Ruler", 134.

7.1.2 Receiving and performing *sīra*: Directly intended audiences

We have above dealt with literary production at court and highlighted a number of genres that were appreciated in these settings (3.3.2). It turned out that an early manuscript of the *sīra* written by Bahāʾ al-Dīn b. Shaddād circulated amongst a number of courtly agents in the period under study, and that a manuscript copy of ʿImād al-Dīn al-Kātib al-Iṣfahānī's *al-Fatḥ al-Qussī fī l-fatḥ al-Qudsī* was owned by ʿAlāʾ al-Dīn b. ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir. Furthermore, at least two texts which I have called "Battle Treatises" were most certainly performed at court or donated to two sultans' libraries: a first by Shāfiʿ b. ʿAlī dealt with the battle at Homs, and was later integrated into his *sīra* of Qalāwūn; a second was written by ʿAlāʾ al-Dīn b. ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir and according to al-Nuwayrī — who quoted much of the text — performed at the court of al-Nāṣir Muḥammad. There are also several examples of later literary offerings explicitly addressed to the sultan's or a prominent emir's library, visible by way of explicit mentions of dedicatees on title pages or by mentions in their prefaces, and the historical sources provide many examples of panegyric production for major political events.

As we have seen, the *sīra*'s have traditonally been seen as fitting that picture. The traditional way to establish such a practice is by looking at the ways in which the texts talk about dedication in their prefaces.[13] However, most of the surviving manuscripts do not contain explicit mentions of a dedicatee on their title pages or elsewhere in the text. Ibn ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir's *sīra* of Baybars may have been intended for courtly consumption, as noted, but its manuscripts in fact do not really attest of such a practice. The one exception to this is Shāfiʿ's *al-Faḍl al-maʾthur*, of which the lavishly decorated title page states:

برسم الخزانة العالية المولوية المخدومية المالكية الشهابية

Intended for the sublime library of the possessing lord the employer Shihāb [al-Dīn].[14]

[13] H. Touati defines the practice in "l'institution dédicatiare" as follows: "Un écrivain, en offrant son oeuvre à un grand personnage, atteste de sa grandeur et de son bon goût; en retour, le puissant, en gratifiant l'écrivain, donne une reconnaissance publique à son talent. Dans cette transaction, pouvoir et savoir trouvent leur compte; pendant que l'un voit son prestige rehaussé, l'autre est publiquement consacré". Touati, "La dédicace des livres en Islam médiévale", *Annales: Histoire, Sciences Sociales,* 55/2 (2000), 330. It should be noted that Touati's evaluation is mostly based on texts from before the Mamluk period, and entirely based on textual (i.e. non-material) evidence.

[14] Bodleian Marsh 424, 1r.

The formulation of this dedication by way of adjectives is not uncommon (we have indeed seen it above in the title of *al-Alṭāf al-khafiyya*), but it does make identifying the owner of the library a complex undertaking. The only thing we may be certain of is that this person had the *kunya* Shihāb al-Dīn. The "*mālikiyya*", which I have translated as "possessing" may also denote the person's affiliation with the Mālikī school of law, but I think it is more likely that here the meaning of possession is intended, considering the words it is grouped together with (*mawlā, makhdūm*).[15]

There are several possible contenders for this Shihāb al-Dīn. If we start from the assumption that it must have been a sultan or someone at the very highest – that is, military or sultanic – echelons of power, a first possibility is al-Nāṣir Shihāb al-Dīn Aḥmad b. Muḥammad b. Qalāwūn (d. 744 / 1344), who reigned as third successor to al-Nāṣir Muḥammad for about three months in 742 / 1342, well after Shāfiʿ's death in 730 / 1330. Shihāb al-Dīn Aḥmad was born in 1316 and was thus only 14 years old when Shāfiʿ himself died. Frédéric Bauden notes that we hear only very little of this son before the early 730s / 1330s,[16] so it seems quite unlikely that he played a role of any importance before our author's death. Furthermore, as the text contains no mentions of events or updates after the conquest of Acre, it seems unlikely that Shāfiʿ would have waited so long to offer it to a patron.

More likely candidates are found in the higher echelons of the *dīwān al-inshāʾ*. One is immediately inclined to accord the honour to Shihāb al-Dīn b. Faḍl Allāh al-ʿUmarī (d. 749 / 1349) who came to Egypt in 728 / 1328, two years before the death of our author. At that time he was assistant to his father Muḥyī l-Dīn Yaḥyā b. Faḍl Allāh who was appointed *kātib al-sirr* in Egypt after having served for several years in this function in Syria. Shihāb al-Dīn al-ʿUmarī only took office as *kātib al-sirr* himself in 739 / 1339, so it does seem rather early in his career to be offered such a text, although he was certainly already an influential agent before he took up the highest position. Furthermore, considering the text's time frame we may again make the comment that this would have meant Shāfiʿ waited rather long to donate this text. I believe the most likely candidate to be Muḥyī l-Dīn Yaḥyā b. Faḍl Allāh's predecessor as Syrian *kātib al-sirr* Shihāb al-Dīn Maḥmūd al-Ḥalabī who served in Damascus from 717 / 1317 until 725 / 1325 and, most importantly, held office in the Cairo chancery during the last decade of the seventh /

[15] For a very similar formulation in a somewhat later manuscript, see Shihāb al-Dīn al-Nuwayrī's *Kitāb al-jāmiʿ al-ṣaḥīḥ* in Fazıl Ahmed Paşa MS 362, folio 17r (dated to 725 / 1325) in which the manuscript's dedication is noted as: برسم الخزانة العالية المولوية السيدية المالكية المخدومية الصاحبية عمرها الله بدوام مالكها The term *mālik* is used much less ambiguously here and clearly denotes the owner of the library. Page reproduced in E. Muhanna, "Encyclopaedism in the Mamluk Period: The Composition of Shihāb al-Dīn al-Nuwayrī's (D. 1333) *Nihāyat al-Arab fī funūn al-Adab*" (Unpublished PhD Thesis, Harvard University, 2012), 238.

[16] F. Bauden, "The Sons of al-Nāṣir Muḥammad and the Politics of Puppets: Where Did It All Start?", *MSR* 13/1 (2009), 67-72.

thirteenth and during most of the first two decades of the eighth / fourteenth centuries. We have also come across his name several times as one of the great stylistic masters of the age and as one of the most prominent agents in the literary field of the period (see 3.1.). Despite his towering position, modern scholarship has not paid much attention to him beyond noting him as an important littérateur of the period — albeit not important enough to warrant a specific study in a European language.[17] His period in Cairo is especially badly documented, but when going through historical and other works dealing with this period he appears several times as a courtly agent. His own work *Ḥusn al-tawassul fī ṣināʿat al-tarassul,* a discussion of rhetorics as a principal requirement for good *tarassul,* applied to poetry and self-written prose pieces, includes an answer to a letter by the Andalusian ruler Muḥammad b. Yūsuf b. Naṣr, known as Ibn Aḥmar. This ruler died in 671 / 1273, so the text presumably must have been written before or around that date, although it is unclear in whose service he was at that time.[18] Shihāb al-Dīn b. Faḍl Allāh al-ʿUmarī tells us that he was active in the service of *(bayna yaday)* Ibn Salʿūs, al-Ashraf Khalīl's powerful vizier, after being invited to take up the vacant position in the chancery left by the death of Ibn ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir.[19] It seems that he survived the tumultuous period following the near-simultaneous murder of both al-Ashraf Khalīl and Ibn Salʿūs, the first sultanate of al-Nāṣir Muḥammad, and the following years, as he is quoted by al-Qalqashandī as the author of the diplomas of investiture for the sultans al-ʿĀdil Kitbughā (r. 694 / 1294 - 695 / 1296) and al-Manṣūr Lājin (r. 696 / 1296 - 698 / 1299), both of whom reigned between the first and second reign of al-Nāṣir Muḥammad.[20] Al-Nuwayrī also notes Shihāb al-Dīn Maḥmūd as the one who composed a *tawqīʿ* which al-Nuwayrī had to bring to Tripoli in 710 / 1310, shortly after al-Nāṣir Muḥammad's third ascension of the throne.[21]

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[17] His relatively obscure position in modern research has for example resulted in Li Guo quite unfortunately referring to him as "an obscure figure" and "a low-ranking clerk" who could not be identified in much detail (a quick look in the biographical dictionaries of the period would have sufficed to dispel this notion), although he does note the importance of his writings as source material for Quṭb al-Dīn al-Yūnīnī. Li Guo, *Early Mamluk Syrian Historiography: Al-Yūnīnī's* Dhayl Mirʾat al-zamān, *Volume One* (Leiden: Brill, 1998), 63-64. An exception to the dearth of studies on this important author are two papers by the Iraqi scholar ʿAbd al-Hādī ʿAbd al-Raḥmān al-Shāwī, "Rasāʾil Shihāb al-Dīn Maḥmūd al-Ḥalabī (h. 725): Ittijāhātu-hā al-mawḍūʿiyya wa-samātu-hā al-fanniyya" (2011) unpublished paper, in https://www.academia.edu/11638350/رسائل_شهاب_الدين_الحلبي_ت725هـ_اتجاهاتها_الموضوعية_وسماتها_الفنية ; al-Shāwī and Ḥusayn ʿAbd al-ʿĀlī Buʿaywī, "Shihāb al-Dīn al-Ḥalabī wa-juhūdu-hu al-adabiyya", *al-ʿAdad,* 40 (2016), 211-237.

[18] Shihāb al-Dīn Maḥmūd, *Ḥusn al-tawassul fī ṣināʿat al-tarassul* (Cairo: Maṭbaʿat Amīn Efendī, 1898), 136.

[19] Shihāb al-Dīn b. Faḍl Allāḥ al-ʿŪmarī, *Masālik al-abṣār,* 12:295.

[20] al-Qalqashandī, *Ṣubḥ,* 11:47-58.

[21] al-Nuwayrī, *Nihāyat al-arab,* 32:122. Elias Muhanna suggests that his dispatch to Tripoli was the end for al-Nuwayrī's possible (never explicitly stated) ambitions to attain the high position of *wakīl al-khāṣṣ. The World in a Book,* 98.

In short, this Shihāb al-Dīn Maḥmūd was a towering literary figure of the period and he had an important position in the *dīwān al-inshāʾ* of Cairo and Damascus at the end of the seventh / thirteenth and beginning of the eighth / fourteenth century, which coincides with the period during which Shāfiʿ finished and most likely also offered this text to its dedicatee. As such, I believe he is the mostly likely candidate to have been offered this text, presumably during the last year of the reign of al-Ashraf Khalīl or during the first sultanate of al-Nāṣir Muḥammad, considering its conclusion on the conquest of Acre. Reading the information contained in *al-Faḍl al-maʾthur* as being communicated to an agent in the *dīwān* and not to the sultan or a prominent amir in fact elucidates some peculiar elements of the author's personal presentation, not in the least his penchant for detailing his own participation in chancery affairs and his extensive showcasing of his writerly abilities, sometimes to the detriment of (or at least in competition with) his (erstwhile) colleagues. Shihāb al-Dīn Maḥmūd's ascent in the Cairene chancery follows the deaths of Ibn ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir and Fatḥ al-Dīn b. ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir who were likely our author's most important connections to court at the time. As noted above (see 3.1.), a poem of al-Sirāj al-Warrāq cited by al-Ṣafadī as sent to Shāfiʿ was apparently meant to mediate between the poet and Fatḥ al-Dīn b. ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir in some unspecified business. The fact that it was sent to Shāfiʿ highlights that the close family connection also had professional ramifications. I have also noted there that when Fatḥ al-Dīn's son ʿAlāʾ al-Dīn b. ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir died in 717 / 1317, Shihāb al-Dīn Maḥmūd is reported to have written an elegy for him which he addressed to Shāfiʿ. Considering the literary entanglements of all these agents, and the fact that much of this interaction consisted of sending each other poems and prose texts, it seems likely that *sīra* too could be used in such exchanges.

The possibility of the manuscript of *al-Faḍl al-maʾthur* having been offered to an official in the *dīwān al-inshāʾ* rather than to the sultan begs the question of why an author would do so? Was it not the sultan who accorded a specific rank and position to courtly agents? It seems that this was often only indirectly so, as several anecdotes tell us about the appointment of *kuttāb* by other more highly placed *kuttāb*. We have for example seen that Fatḥ al-Dīn was appointed by Ibn Luqmān, and that Ibn ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir is said to have addressed a *risāla* to a number of high ranking *kuttāb* during the reign of Baybars' predecessor al-Muẓaffar Quṭuz. This last example demonstrates that texts could be used in the context of career advancement. There is furthermore evidence that the practice of dedicating works to the libraries of highly placed *kuttāb* was not uncommon.[22]

[22] A later example is Najm al-Dīn al-Qalqashandī, son of the well-known al-Qalqashandī who wrote *Ṣubḥ al-aʿshā*, offering two copies of his father's work to the libraries of the two important chancery officials Nāṣir al-Dīn Muḥammad b. Muḥammad al-Bārizī and Badr al-Dīn Muḥammad b. Muḥammad b. Muzhir in the early

It is not clear what Shāfiʿ would have had in mind when offering this *sīra* to an important *kātib,* but considering the fact that he seems to have been secluded at home at the time of writing, it seems to make a lot of sense as a text meant to cement a connection to an important *kātib* at the time, if not to be reinstated in the chancery, at least to make sure that his connection to the institution would not dry up after the deaths of two of his close relatives. Similar to how Jo Van Steenbergen has evaluated the short panegyric *al-Nūr al-lāʾiḥ* by Ibrāhīm b. al-Qaysarānī we can argue that the text:

> can be read as an attempt by [the author] to demonstrate his wit, his skills and his credentials to a potential new patron, either the new sultan or […] someone from his close entourage. In the case of the latter, the function of the work would not be so much to communicate the legitimacy of the new ruler's accession to an undefined audience […] but rather to try and use effective cultural forms for the symbolic communication of individual claims to identity and status addressed to that ruler and his entourage. It was a leading secretary's attempt to communicate and establish new bonds with his overlords, embedding such functionality in an established belletrist literary form that enabled the performance of this secretary's social identity, status and entitlement in a semiotic interaction with his intended audience of courtiers and peers.[23]

This is of course all rather hypothetical in the case of *al-Faḍl al-maʾthur* but, again similar to *al-Nūr al-lāʾiḥ,* the manuscript Marsh 424 itself makes clear that this was not a casually produced manuscript: its title page is one of the most elaborately decorated examples of our corpus — although it is bested by the manuscripts of *Tashrīf al-ayyām* and *al-Alṭāf al-khafiyya* which do not only contain beautifully decorated title pages but were also widely spaced throughout, a sign of considerable expense (see Appendix A for a full colour reproduction).[24] Marsh 424's decoration is at the same time relatively idiosyncratic,[25] with its asymmetric juxtaposition of three unequal rectangular panels: the top panel is a square with the text's title written in cloudbands and with floral decoration with a circular gold medallion attached to its left side; the middle panel (reproduced above) includes the dedication also written in cloudbands; and the bottom

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decades of the 9th / 15th century. Bauden, "Maqriziana XIII: An Exchange of Correspondence between al-Maqrīzī and al-Qalqashandī", 203.

[23] "Qalāwūnid Discourse", 23-24. I have edited out the specific evaluation of Ibrāhīm b. al-Qaysarānī's work to make the quote more broadly applicable.

[24] The size of the writing surface of Arabe 1704 is 155x120 mm (paper size 260x190 mm), thus about two centimetres (vertical) per line. https://archivesetmanuscrits.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/cc29654m The paper size of the Munich manuscript of *Alṭāf* is similar to Arabe 1704: 25x19 cm. Aumer, *Die Arabischen Handscriften,* 159.

[25] Personal communication by Konrad Hirschler.

square filling out the page horizontally with an invocation (*ʿammara-hā Allāh taʿālā bi-biqāʾi-hi*) again with floral motives. The author's name is not included in a separate panel, but is given next to the middle panel containing the dedication in cloudbands as "*khidmat al-mamlūk al-kātib al-manṣūrī Shāfiʿ b. ʿAlī*", explicitly highlighting Shāfiʿ's position as a servant (*khidmat al-mamlūk*) and *kātib* of the sultan whose life will be depicted, al-Manṣūr Qalāwūn. As David James has claimed, "illumination is as individual an art as representational painting"so in theory it may be possible to identify other [26], manuscripts illuminated by the same artist, but unfortunately this lies beyond the scope of this dissertation.

The unusualness of Marsh 424's frontispiece lies in its asymmetrical organisation, wich I have not come across in other high-profile donated texts of the period. The forms of the frontispieces as found in the manuscripts of the other *sīra* manuscripts seem to have adhered to more common forms (see reproductions in Appendix A) but were clearly similarly lavishly decorated and thus likely intended for a high-profile audience:

- *al-Alṭāf al-khafiyya*'s frontispiece is made up of one large centrally placed rectangular panel in which an oval medallion at the top contains the text *al-juzʾ al-thālith* ("the third volume"); an internal square filled with floral motives contains the text's title in cloudbands. A roundel with a floral motive is attached to the panel's left side at the same height as the top medallion. A smaller square containing the author's name on the bottom left of the page attached to the main square is highly similar to that in *al-Faḍl al-maʾthur* reading *khidmat al-mamlūk ʿAbd Allāh b. ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir al-kātib al-ashrafī*", "a service [rendered] by the servant ʿAbd Allāh b. ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir, the *kātib* of al-Ashraf [Khalīl]". I have not been able to gather information on the colour of this frontispiece.
- *Tashrīf al-ayyām*'s frontispiece is slightly less elaborate but similar in the sense that it consists of one square panel with an oval medallion with the text *al-juzʾ al-thānī* ("the second volume") and then an internal panel with the text's title in cloudbands surrounded by floral motives, the latter executed in red, according to the catalogue description of the Bibliothèque Nationale de France. A decorative roundel is attached to the panel's top left, at the same height as the oval medallion, both executed in blue and gold.
- ʿIzz al-Dīn b. Shaddād's *Tārīkh al-Malik al-Ẓāhir* has a slightly different but equally well attested format for its frontispiece: it consists of a large rectangular but not fully decorated panel (that is, it contains much white space) with the top part

[26] D. James, *Qurʾāns of the Mamlūks* (London: Alexandria Press/Thames & Hudson, 1988), 47.

filled out with an oval blue-and-gold medallion and a scalloped golden medallion in the middle of the white panel. The text's title and an invocation are spread across these two medallions: *al-juzʾ al-thānī min Tārīkh al-Malik al-Ẓāhir taghammada-hu taʿālā bi-raḥmatin amīn* ("the second volume of the History of al-al-Malik al-Ẓāhir, may God protect him by his grace, amen"). At the height of the top medallion a decorative roundel is added.[27]

The other manuscripts are either missing their title pages, or, in the case of *Ḥusn al-manāqib* are less elaborately executed, thus providing no hints about its possible dedication. Frédéric Bauden is however of the opinion that the manuscript of *Sīrat al-Nāṣir Muḥammad* which is missing both its first and last pages must also have been a presentation copy considering its textual layout with nine relatively widely spaced lines per page on a writing surface of 175x115mm.[28] Similar arguments may be made for both manuscripts of *al-Rawḍ al-zāhir,* both of which are neatly written copies.

As such, we are dealing with a corpus of manuscripts that were executed predominantly in the fashion of presentation copies, at least one of may have been offered to a high-ranking official in the chancery. Considering the common stress on writerly activities throughout the texts, as we have discussed extensively in Part Two, an extended audience of fellow *kuttāb* is at least likely for the other texts as well. The important claim that the *kātib* was necessary for the sultan's *dawla* to exist and to survive the passage of time is one that would have resonated especially with such an audience, while the complex interweaving of registers and showcasing of stylistic mastery would have entertained an audience of peers moreso than one of the military elite, whose command of Arabic may often have been less than perfect. This is not to say that a sultanic audience or one of agents in the military elite is impossible, but only that there is very little internal or external evidence for this supposition and that internal evidence rather suggests a broader audience. It is however possible to say a little more about the later audiences who engaged with the texts, which is what we will now turn to.

[27] A rather similar but more elaborately decorated frontispiece to this one may be found in the unique manuscript of Ibn al-Shiḥna's much later eighth / fifteenth century text *al-Badr al-zāhir fī nuṣrat al-Malik al-Nāṣir Muḥammad Qāyitbāy,* in BnF Arabe 1793. This manuscript contains an explicit dedication to the sultan's library.

[28] Personal communication. On the page size, https://archivesetmanuscrits.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/cc29655v

7.2 Later receptions and engagements

The initially intended audiences are thus in most cases difficult to ascertain, although we have been able to formulate a plausible hypothesis on the basis of a number of material and textual considerations. Throughout the centuries after their production, manuscripts typically engage a number of further audiences: private libraries are sold off and the individual manuscripts contained within them end up in various hands, both private and institutional (for example in *waqf*-contexts), sometimes travelling halfway across the world to a new destination. The following sections will discuss the evidence found on the manuscripts that attest of their afterlives: a first deals with the evidence which I broadly call "Middle Eastern" to broaden the audience from the initial Arabic-Islamicate contexts in which the texts were written and consumed and to allow us to take into account later engagements in other languages, especially Ottoman Turkish, and possible non-Muslim audiences.[29] This will be done both via manuscript studies and via a classical historical-critical approach, by looking at the material quoted by later historians. I will also evaluate later mentions of the authors and their texts, to map a greater variety of engagements beyond the material and textually cited evidence. The second section deals with evidence of five of the six texts' travels in the early modern period towards various European libraries. Some of these trajectories can be reconstructed in part and make for a fascinating though admittedly diffuse case study of early modern manuscript circulation. A summarising table of the information about the manuscript travels discussed in 7.2.1.1. and 7.2.2. is provided at the end of this section, just before the conclusion of this chapter.

7.2.1 The Middle East

7.2.1.1 Manuscript circulation

Medieval manuscripts often provide a wealth of information about their circulation through the various ownership and consultation notes left on their pages. The names of the persons mentioned in these notes can sometimes be traced in the historical literature, and as such, in the best of cases, networks of agents engaging with the texts can be reconstructed. While it is an interesting, and indeed in my opinion necessary task to evaluate the evidence found on the manuscripts of the corpus of *sīra*'s, it should be

[29] Of course, Arabic notes may also have been left by European orientalists, but I have no specific indications that this happened somewhere in the corpus.

noted at the outset that the *sīra*'s do not seem to have been particularly widely read, and that many of the notes found on the texts are confusing rather than enlightening.

In my evaluation I have followed the broad definition of manuscript notes as given by Andreas Görke and Konrad Hirschler in their introduction to a volume specifically devoted to this topic, as "any written material that is found on a manuscript that does not belong to the main text(s), irrespective of whether it refers to the main text and the legal status of the manuscript or is entirely unrelated to text and manuscript itself".[30] The table below gives an overview of the most important notes found in the seven manuscripts of the main corpus, as well as the Edirne manuscript of Ibn Shaddād's *Tārīkh al-Malik al-Ẓāhir,* which I am here adding to the analysis as a related contemporary text that may provide us some comparative insights. Although correction notes may be said to fall under the above definition, I have left them out of the table. I have also left out undated and unnamed invocations as they would otherwise clog the overview. I will follow the order of the table in my discussion below.

Manuscript	Notes
Istanbul Fatih 4366 (*Rawḍ*)	Title page: stylised *tughra* 1r: - Seal of Ottoman Sultan Maḥmūd I (r. 1143 / 1730 – 1168 / 1754) - 1r.: note referring to sultan Maḥmūd Khān - 1r.: unidentified seal 32r: marginal note : "*ḥāshiyat al-khuṭba li-Sharaf al-Dīn b. al-Muqaddasī*" 82r: marginal note : "*naẓara fī hādhihi l-tārīkh*" (no name visible on scan)
BL O/C Add. 23331 (*Rawḍ*)	48r: wiped out note
BnF Arabe 1704 (*Tashrīf*)	Title page (1r): ملك أحمد الظهوي [?] العباسي الحرفي طريقة (I have not found this person who identifies himself as a *ḥurufī*)
München Aumer 405 (*Alṭāf*)	Title page (1r.): - Ownership note: *"fī nawbat al-faqīr taʿālā"* - Effaced note 107v: different hand wrote "*waqf*" on top of the page

[30] A. Görke & K. Hirschler, *Manuscript Notes as Documentary Sources* (Beirut-Würzburg: Orient Institut-Ergon Verlag, 2011), 9-11.

Bodleian Marsh 424 (*Faḍl*)	Title page (1r): - Consultation note by Aḥmad b. ʿAlī [al-Maqrīzī] - Ownership note, mostly illegible to me, possibly by a certain ʿAbd Allāh 26v: pseudo-Persian poem inserted in blank space originally likely intended for title 33v & 35v: two unrelated paper notes with popular expressions and *ḥadīth* bound together with manuscript 136r: - Consultation note by Ibrāhīm b. Aḥmad b. Ibrāhīm, dated to 912 / 1507 - Consultation note by Badr al-Dīn b. Aḥmad b. al-Shaykh, dated to 929 / 1522-3 - Unidentified and mostly illegible seal 136v.: - Two-line poem written by ʿAṭā l-Lāh b. Hasan, known as Ibn al-Shaykh, dated 1012 / 1594 (quoted above) - Consultation note by Muḥammad b. Muhannā al-Dawādār, dated 799 / 1397 - Consultation note by Ibrāhīm b. al-Shaykh b. al-Shaykh b. al-Shaykh, undated 137r.: - Ownership note by ʿAṭā l-Lāh b. Hasan, known as Ibn al-Shaykh, dated 1012 / 1604 (see also first note 136v) - One mostly effaced ownership note, two notes without name or date 137v.: - Two-line poem - Incomprehensible note in same hand in pseudo-Ottoman Turkish (?), dated to 1058 / 1648
BnF Arabe 1707 (*Ḥusn*)	Flyleaf: illegible note 1r: Illegible ownership note 1v: Lengthy undated note discussing unrelated religious issues 147v: Marginal note: "*kataba bi-hā li-waladi-hi l-Malik al-Saʿīd Bereke Qān ilā Miṣr*" 156v-161v: Four folio's of an unrelated Sufi text in two slightly different hands
Bnf Arabe 1705 (*Sīrat al-Nāṣir Muḥammad*)	Title page: - Two incorrect titles - Undated ownership note by Muḥammad al-Turk - Mostly effaced note dated to 989 / 1581 26r: Reading note by Muḥammad al-Abbār 76v: Marginal note by later hand signposting the start of the sultanate of Baybars II 95r: Marginal note by later hand commenting about authenticity of the caliph 104r: Marginal note in same hand as previous note, incomprehensible comment to me Last page: undated consultation note by Muḥammad Abū l-Suʿūd al-Amīnī al-Ḥanafī

Selimiye 2306 (*Tārīkh al-Malik al-Ẓāhir*)	Flyleaf: - Ownership note by unnamed person who received the manuscript from a certain "Aḥmad Çelebi, preacher in the Üç Şerefeli mosque [in Edirne]" (built between 1438-1447) Title page: - Invocation + ownership note, but the latter has been effaced 72v and 264v: Ottoman Turkish marginal notes commenting on rare Arabic word "*sarāqūj*" and a particular traveling distances 96v: Marginal note by Muḥammad Sharaf al-Dīn [al-Mudarris, 98r] on the granting of Diyārbakr as an *iqṭāʿ* to Bahāʾ al-Dīn. The same hand has clarified words that were blotted out (or written unclearly) in the main text in the margin on folio's 97r, 98r, 111r, 118r. 111r: name of Ghiyāth al-Dīn has been scribbled over in red ink 163v: Marginal note adding information on the ages of Baybars' sons Salāmish and Khiḍr (discussed in edition *Tārīkh al-Malik al-Ẓāhir,* 233) 164v: Marginal note adding part of a name 269v (last page): Note written by Muḥammad Sharaf al-Dīn (see 96v above), claiming that he translated the text into Turkish in 1356 / 1937.

Table 5: overview of manuscript notes per *sīra*

As we shall see below in 7.2.1.2., based on external evidence, *al-Rawḍ al-zāhir* seems to have been the most widely circulated text in our corpus: it is the only text that is referred to relatively often by later authors, several of whom also quote excerpts from it. By contrast, neither of the two preserved manuscripts tell us very much about its circulation immediately after its composition. It is of course true that both manuscripts have preserved neither their title page nor their colophons and cover sheets, the places where one usually finds the majority of ownership notes. The Istanbul manuscript Fatih 4366 is the most informative: it does include a title page, but the title stated on it is erroneous (*al-Rawḍ al-bāsim* by a certain al-Sijistānī).[31] Aside from a stylised *tughra* it bears no reference to an owner. The actual first page of the text does bear two seals and a note. The first of these seals is that of sultan Mahmud I — I am assuming that the *tughra* on the flyleaf, which looks similar in broad lines, is the same, but handdrawn.[32] The earliest attestation of this manuscript is thus the 12th / 18th century, well after its presumed initial copying, judging by its Mamluk *naskh* orthography. The running text of Fatih 4366 contains an interesting but rather elusive note. On folio 32r, next to the start of the *khuṭba* delivered on the occasion for the swearing of allegiance to the new caliph al-Ḥākim, a hand that is rather similar to that of the copyist wrote "*ḥāshiyat al-*

[31] Several texts bearing the title *al-Rawḍ al-bāsim* are attested, but I have come across none written by an author with the *nisba* al-Sijistānī.
[32] Chester Beatty Library Seals Project, *http://www.cbl.ie/islamicseals/View-Seals/124.aspx*

khuṭba li-Sharaf al-Dīn b. al-Muqaddasī". This Ibn al-Muqaddasī is identifiable: he was a particularly active *khaṭīb* in Damascus until his death on the 17th of Ramaḍān 694 / 31 July 1295.[33] What does this note mean? That he delivered this *khuṭba* or that it was delivered first in Cairo and then by Ibn al-Muqaddasī in Damascus? Or that he wrote a commentary (*ḥāshiya* usually refers to a running commentary on a text in the margins) to it which the copyist is telling us about but not supplying? The note is tantalising but without further information it is impossible to say much more about it.

Ibn ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir's later texts apparently did not circulate widely at all: both manuscripts only contain one or two (unidentifiable) ownership notes on their title pages. The Munich manuscript of *al-Alṭāf al-khafiyya* contains a very brief note reading simply "*waqf*" and thus highlighting the start of the manuscript's lenghty quotation of a *waqf*-document, perhaps meant to highlight specific documentary information in the text. A devil's advocate may even suggest that the text's inclusion of this *waqf*-document may be one of the reasons why it was preserved, unlike the (at least) three other volumes of this particular work, but there is no actual evidence to support such a claim, and the manuscript's artful execution may account just as much for the text's survival.

The text richest in notes is without a doubt, and perhaps surprisingly, the Bodleian manuscript of Shāfiʿ's *al-Faḍl al-maʾthūr*. Its beautifully executed but damaged title page still contains two legible notes, one of which is an ownership note of which I can not make out much more than the word *mulk*, "ownership", and possibly ʿAbd Allāh; the other is a consultation note by a certain Aḥmad b. ʿAlī, which I could not make much of myself, but which professor Frédéric Bauden has identified as being the famous historian al-Maqrīzī, whose handwriting is well known to him.[34] The note says that al-Maqrīzī "derived benefit from it" (*istifāda min-hu*), but as far as I know he did not actually make use of the text and did not refer to it in any of his writings. The earliest dated note on the text is by a certain Muḥammad b. Muhannā l-Dawādār in 799 / 1397, a person I have unfortunately not been able to identify,[35] but the fact that he (or his father) is named as a *dawādār* is suggestive for a possible continued elite audience almost a century after the text's presumed initial composition.

As seen in the table, a number of later notes in this manuscript are named and dated to the early ninth / sixteenth until the tenth / seventeenth century which implies the

[33] Ibn Kathīr, *al-Bidāya wa-l-nihāya,* vol. 17:678-679.

[34] Personal communication. For Bauden's thorough study of al-Maqrīzī's working method by way of his personal notebook preserved in a unique manuscript in Liège, see "Maqriziana I: Discovery of an Autograph Manuscript of al-Maqrīzī:Towards a Better Understanding of His Working Method. Description: Section 1" *MSR* 7/2 (2003), 21-68; idem, "Section 2", *MSR* 10/ 2 (2006), 81-139.

[35] Ibn Khaldūn does mention a Muḥammad b. Muhannā in the year 791 / 1389-90 as a person who "commanded the Beduins" (*walā ʿalā al-ʿarab*), but despite the matching time-frame the generity of the name makes securely identifying these two persons as the same impossible. Ibn Khaldūn, *Tārīkh Ibn Khaldūn,* ed. J. Shaḥāda & S. Zakkār (Beirut: Dār al-fikr, 2000), vol. 5:569

work's continuing circulation, but the names are so generic that identifying them with any certainty is nigh impossible. However, a connection between two of them seems possible as they both bear the name Ibn al-Shaykh: Badr al-Dīn b. Aḥmad b. al-Shaykh, dated to 929 / 1522-3 and ʿAṭā l-Lāh b. Hasan b. al-Shaykh, dated to 1012 / 1604, who wrote the poem quoted at the outset of this chapter. I am assuming "Ibn al-Shaykh" to have been a family name and not a vague patronymic. Another note by a certain Ibrāhīm b. al-Shaykh is also included, but not dated. The text may thus have been in the hands of the same family for almost a century.

The last dated note on the text is from the year 1058 / 1648 but the language used, written in Arabic script and seemingly Turkic, is either unknown to me and dr. Kristof D'hulster or is simply nonsensical. Similarly, a poem written by a different hand in a white space where a heading title would normally be expected in the main text, is written in a bizarre grammatically nonsensical Persian.[36] These occurrences, though not meaningful in themselves, are suggestive of the manuscript's continued circulation as an object in times when Ottoman Turkish and Persian became important languages of cultural expression across the Middle East. My hypothesis is that we can see in both these notes how Arabic-speaking (or perhaps simply non-Ottoman and non-Persian speaking) agents tried to participate in the linguistic and cultural hegemony of Persian and Ottoman Turkish, albeit with less than perfect command of the grammatical intricacies specific to these languages.

As we shall see below, Marsh 424's circulation as an object stands quite in contrast to the text's Arabic historiographical appreciation. The loose notes containing popular sayings and *ḥadīth* that have been bound together with the manuscript suggest similar practices, but may in fact have been bound together only after the manuscripts arrived in the Bodleian library on Oxford, as Jan Just Witkam has argued for other manuscripts in the Marsh collection.[37] Somewhat similarly perhaps, but more meaningful in the strict sense (i.e. actually understandable within the rules of grammar), the Paris manuscript of *Ḥusn al-manāqib* also contains a short note on religious issues on its flyleaf as well as a rather lengthy addition of four folio's of an unrelated Sufi text talking about the soul ("*al-nafs*") written in two slightly different hands.[38]

Contrary to what we may expect, another one of the more extensively glossed texts is again one written by Shāfiʿ, namely his *sīra* of al-Nāṣir Muḥammad (BnF Arabe 1705). It contains a number of notes with names, but unfortunately I have not been able to identify any of these more closely due to their relative genericness, and their lack and

[36] I am grateful to Kristof D'hulster, Pouye Khoshkhoosani, and Elham Shayegh for trying to decipher this poem (and in D'Hulster's case also the pseudo-Turkic comment) for me. Their interpretations differed wildly, but all were equally unrelated to the main Arabic text.
[37] J.J. Witkam, *Jacobus Golius (1596-1667) en Zijn Handschriften* (Leiden: Brill, 1980), 70.
[38] I am grateful to Tarek Sabraa for his advice on the topic of the Sufi text.

geographical information. One mostly effaced note on the title page is dated to the year 989 / 1581, indicating the text's circulation well after its initial composition. The title page also carries two incorrect titles, which may have been added by a bookseller. Two readers also engaged with the contents of the main text, one adding comments about the authenticity of the caliph in Cairo as well as a rather incomprehensible note near the end of the manuscript about cockroaches. More comprehensible is a note highlighting the start of the sultanate of al-Muẓaffar Baybars (al-Jāshnikīr) in the narrative, perhaps marking the text for the consultation of specific information.

ʿIzz al-Dīn b. Shaddād's *Tārīkh* fared similar to the *sīra*'s. It bears a few notes with names, but I have not been able to identify the first, a preacher in Edirne, with any certainty.[39] The other is a peculiar one: a certain Muḥammad Sharaf al-Dīn who identifies himself as al-Mudarris left a number of marginal comments in the manuscript, only to identify himself more fully at the end of the manuscript, where it emerges that this is no other than Mehmed Şerefüddin Yaltkaya, who translated the text into modern Turkish in 1937.[40] Less than a century ago, a Turkish scholar thus still participated in the practices of manuscript notation. Perhaps he felt invited to do so by a number of Ottoman Turkish marginal comments in the manuscript clarifying an Arabic word or giving information on a particular distance.

The amount of information given to us by manuscript notes is bewildering: very few of the notes give us any secure information, and when we are indeed able to identify a reader (such as Frédéric Bauden's identification of al-Maqrīzī as a reader of *al-Faḍl maʾthūr*) it is often just that: the fact that a certain person owned the book or read it, the importance of which would need to be qualified by further research into the notator's own writings, which in the case of al-Maqrīzī does not seem to have been the case immediately. The corpus studied here is too small to make any big claims about manuscript circulation of the period, let alone to reconstruct networks of readers and owners, but the evidence does clearly show that several of these works did not simply disappear from the radar after their initial composition. This does add an important footnote to the general impression one gets from reading especially the historical work of Shāfiʿ, which, as we shall see, was not quoted nor even acknowledged by most later historians. The manuscripts show by contrast that they were engaged with in a variety of ways by later agents, including at least one major historian of the eighth / fifteenth century as well as at least one elite official.

[39] Several Ahmed Çelebi's from Edirne are identifiable, though none unambiguously. One is in: Abdurrahman Hibrî, *Enîsü'l-müsâmirîn: Edirne Tarihi 1360-1650,* ed. R. Kazancıgıl (Edirne: 1996), 119. There are also a number of possible contenders in M. Süreyya, *Sicill-i Osmani* (Istanbul: Kültür Bakanlığı ile Türkiye Ekonomik ve Toplumsal Tarih Vakfı'nın Ortak Yayınıdır, 1996), vol. 1:164, 174, 185.

[40] It was later published as: *Baypars Tarihi: al-Melik al-Zahir (Baypars) hakkındaki tarihin ikinci cildi,* transl. M. Şerefüddin Yaltkaya (Istanbul: Istanbul Maarif Matbaası, 1941).

7.2.1.2 Text citation

A second way of looking at audience engagements with these texts, is by utilising the traditional historical critical method of filiations and relations between historical texts, which has been especially popular in the field of Mamluk historiographical studies.[41] Who was the first to write about a certain event and who copied which information from whom? Which historians were most likely to give more or less trustworthy accounts of the period in which they lived? This modern fetish for the contemporary historian who was an eyewitness is not completely at odds with the ways in which our authors themselves saw their importance, but it does miss the mark in evaluating the ways in which they themselves claimed superiority to their contemporaries. Both authors stressed their close association to the sultan and their personal witnessing of the events to be described, and modern historians have as such evaluated the importance of the *sīra*'s as laying by and large in their originality: these are versions of accounts which are not found elsewhere among contemporary historians and thus reveal important insider perspectives, although their encomiastic (i.e. "untrustworthy") inclinations necessitate handling the sources with care.[42] But the problem is that Ibn ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir and Shāfiʿ did not really claim to present a more *truthful* version of events in doing so, but rather a more *qualitative* version. Although that quality was informed by their close position to the events, that has more of a bearing on the ways of *presenting* "truth" than on truth as a value bearing on the facts and events themselves.

It is however true that Ibn ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir and Shāfiʿ are relatively exceptional in their almost exclusive reliance on self-written reports of events, which results in highly original, largely non-derivative works of history; an aspect that has been appreciated by many scholars as contributing to their essential worth for those wanting to study the reigns of Baybars, Qalāwūn, al-Ashraf Khalīl. But did historians of the period appreciate them for this reason as well? I have already mentioned a number of times that Ibn ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir's *sīra* of Baybars tended to be quoted by later historians, while the other *sīra*'s were all but entirely forgotten, but it is still necessary to qualify this claim. In the following pages I will present a chronological survey of historians active in the centuries following our author's compositions, and the ways in which they relied on the works of our authors. As a full historical critical analysis lies beyond the scope of this dissertation, I will mostly rely on explicit referrals to our authors and to secondary studies which have discussed textual relationships involving texts from the corpus.

[41] The classic example of this approach are D.P. Little's *An Introduction to Mamlūk Historiography: An Analysis of Arabic Analistic and Biographical Sources for the Reign of al-Malik an-Nāṣir Muḥammad* (Wiesbaden: Franz Steiner, 1970) and Ulrich Haarmann's *Quellenstudien zur frühen Mamlukenzeit.* A much more recent example is S. Massoud, *The Chronicles and Annalistic Sources of the Early Mamluk Circassian Period* (Brill: Leiden, 2007).
[42] See for example: Northrup, *From Slave to Sultan,* 27-28, 31-33.

Because of that pragmatic approach, this overview will be more fundamentally interested in an evaluation of the ways in which our authors were explicitly appraised by medieval Arabic historians and early modern Ottoman scholars. As authors almost exclusively quoted Ibn ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir's *sīra* of Baybars, I will not discuss references to his other *sīra*'s and Shāfiʿ and his writings separately but mention them when they appear.

Ulrich Haarmann calls the three *sīra*'s written by Ibn ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir "quantitativ and qualitativ drei der bedeutesten Quellen zur frühen Mamlukenzeit".[43] Indeed, Baybars al-Manṣūrī, Abū l-Fidāʾ, Ibn al-Dawādāri, and al-Mufaḍḍal b. Abī l-Faḍāʾil are all said to have reproduced material from the *sīra*'s of Baybars and Qalāwūn (the claim is not qualified for the *sīra* of al-Ashraf Khalīl, which I believe was never quoted as a historical source for the period, and in the case of *Tashrīf al-ayyām* it seems to have been mostly documentary), though never explicitly. This is in fact crucial for what I will argue for in the following pages: even though it is doubtlessly true that much material appearing in these *sīra*'s later appeared in other historical sources, it was primarily the poetical and documentary material that was *explicitly* attributed to Ibn ʿAbd al-Ẓāḥir, as if only in those domains his authorial voice was strong enough to warrant being attributed.

The predominantly literary appreciation of Ibn ʿAbd al-Ẓāḥir's *sīra* of Baybars is already visible early on in the appreciation of the amir-historian Baybars al-Manṣūrī (d. 725 / 1325), who began his career as a *mamlūk* in the corps of Qalāwūn and later became *dawādār*. This was thus a contemporary of both our authors who may even have known them personally. He includes an obituary of Ibn ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir in his *Zubdat al-fikra fī tārīkh al-hijra,* in which he qualifies him as having written:

> وله الرسائل البديعة والأشعار الرقيقة والسيرة الظاهرية التي أبدع فيها نظمًا ونثرًا وغير ذلك وقد ذكرنا مقطعات من أشعاره الواردة هذه السيرة * ونبذًا من توقيعاته الأثيرة *

> marvelous letters, tender poems, the *sīra* of al-Ẓāhir [Baybars], in [all of] which he achieved excellent results in poetry and prose, and other [types of texts], and we have mentioned epigrams from his poetical writings which are found [embroidered in] this *sīra,* and a small amount of his selected official writings.[44]

[43] Haarmann, *Quellenstudien,* 97.

[44] *Zubdat al-fikra,* 294-295. Only one of the two manuscript copies of the text used by the editor D.S. Richards includes the phrase "which are found [embroidered in] this *sīra*", so it is not entirely certain that Baybars al-Manṣūrī actually referred to poetry from the *sīra* in this last part, as it may have been a copyist's addition. I have also chosen to translate *al-latī* ("which") as referring not only to the *sīra,* but to all the types of writing referred to before that word.

Zubdat al-fikra does indeed include a number of explicit quotations from Ibn ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir: nine poems and two extracts from official documents (a marriage contract and an edict granting an *iqṭāʿ* to Baybars al-Manṣūrī himself).[45] Several of these can be traced to the *sīra* of Baybars, but others are attested only in *Zubdat al-fikra*, although the poems celebrating the enthronement of Qalāwūn and the victory at the Battle of Homs may have been included in the first volume of *Tashrīf al-ayyām* which has not come down to us. However, if al-Manṣūrī copied them from that latter text, he does not acknowledge having done so, and neither does he note this text in his obituary. It seems likely that these particular poems as high-profile occasional panegyrics circulated more widely at the time. Despite acknowledging Ibn ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir as the author of one *sīra* then, Baybars al-Manṣūrī sets a standard in not attributing historical material taken from that source (or from *Tashrīf al-ayyām,* which Haarmann notes as his major source for the years 682 to 687), and only explicitly noting an authorial attribution for his poetry and documents. Indeed, judging by the evaluation quoted above, he apparently even considered the *sīra* to be primarily a literary work that included poetry and official writings, more so than for historical information which he does not refer to.

The eighth volume of the slightly later author Ibn Aybak al-Dawādārī's (d. after 735/1335-6) world history, which deals with *akhbār al-dawla l-turkiyya* ("reports about the Turkish *dawla*") also contains a number of quotations from Ibn ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir. This includes the same elegy for Baybars quoted by Baybars al-Manṣūrī, but here in a much longer (but still abridged) fifty four-line version,[46] as well as a congratulatory poem on a raid against Sīs.[47] Interestingly, however, Ibn al-Dawādārī's volume also includes a number of supposed quotations from Ibn ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir which are not traceable to the extant *sīra,* such as an account about the conquest of Qayṣariyya in Palestine which includes a number of documents, or a letter from Ethiopia with historical contextualisation.[48] Ibn al-Dawādārī, like Baybars al-Manṣūrī, clearly mostly respected

[45] *Zubdat al-fikra,* 85 (poem on *wāfidī* Mongols), 96 (poem for the conquest of Arsūf), 121 (poem for Baybars' secret *ḥajj*), 128 (poem for the conquest of Ḥisn ʿAkkār), 141 (poem for the birth of Baybars' youngest son Khiḍr), 150 (marriage contract for Bereke Khān), 161-2 (ten lines from the elegy for the death of Baybars), 166 (two-line poem for Bereke's departure to Syria), 177 (poem for the enthronement of Qalāwūn), 202 (poem for the Battle of Homs), 247 (edict). The text also includes one poem (pp. 201-202) by Fatḥ al-Dīn b. ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir congratulating the sultan with his victory in the Battle of Ḥoms, which is also quoted by Shāfiʿ in *al-Faḍl al-maʾthūr.*

[46] *Kanz al-durar,* vol. 8: 214-218. See also the introduction to chapter 4 of this dissertation. Ibn al-Dawādārī also includes another elegy said to have been written by Ibn ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir which is not quoted elsewhere.

[47] *Kanz al-durar,* 8:181-182. This poem is included under events in the year 684, so during Qalāwūn's reign, but it is not included in *Tashrīf al-ayyām,* nor am I aware of an incursion into Sīs during that sultan's reign.

[48] *Kanz al-durar,* 8:108-109, 173-175. This is one of the arguments given by Haarmann and Ṣafwān Ṭaha Ḥassan al-Nāṣir for the text's draft status or inauthenticity. Of course, the Istanbul manuscript of *al-Rawḍ al-zāhir* has several gaps, one of which may have included this information. As we have seen, the practice of historical contextualisation is also quite typical of Ibn ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir, so the Ethiopian section especially may very well be authentic.

Ibn ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir as a composer of official documents and poetry. The same is true for Fatḥ al-Dīn b. ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir and Shāfiʿ b. ʿAlī, both of whom are only quoted as poets and *kuttāb*.[49] By contrast, Ibn al-Dawādārī does relatively often quote historical accounts from ʿIzz al-Dīn b. Shaddād's history of Baybars, which he confusingly refers to as *al-Rawḍ al-zāhir fī sīrat al-Malik al-Ẓāhir*.[50] All but one of these quotations must have been lifted from the first non-surviving volume of Ibn Shaddād's *Tārīkh,* however, for they date from before the year 670 / 1271-2, in which that text's single extant volume commences.[51] One may even hypothetically suggest that the quotations that can not be traced to the *sīra* of Ibn ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir may in fact have been mistakenly attributed to that text, and were actually lifted from Ibn Shaddād's *Tārīkh* – although, as noted, the historicising contents do agree with Ibn ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir's approach.

At least one other semi-contemporary historian made some use of Ibn ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir's *sīra* of Baybars: the Syrian scholar Quṭb al-Dīn al-Yūnīnī (d. 726 / 1326), who is said to have used it as one among several sources for the period of Baybars' rule in his *Dhayl mirʾat al-zamān.* According to Li Guo, who edited and translated one part of this chronicle, al-Yūnīnī quoted both from the historical work and from his official writings, but he provides only one example of a *taqlīd* written by our author and quoted and attributed by al-Yūnīnī. At the same time, he notes that for Baybars' reign, al-Yūnīnī's major source was ʿIzz al-Dīn b. Shaddād's history of Baybars. The first non-extant volume of that text is in fact preserved in part through quotations by this later Syrian author.[52] The Syrian background of Ibn Shaddād may have been important here: al-Yūnīnī is one of the most important historians of the so-called "Syrian school" of historiography who quoted a great deal of each other's material. Indeed, al-Yūnīnī's general main source for later years is his semi-contemporary al-Jazarī, who apparently did not quote any of our authors' historical works – despite devoting ample attention to them in obituaries. The authors from the Syrian school are generally seen as distinctive from an "Egyptian school" of historiography which had stronger ties to the military establishment. Our two authors, though somewhat distinct from the more obvious

[49] *Kanz al-durar,* vol. 8:270 (a poem for the conquest of Marqab by Fatḥ al-Dīn), 292-295 (an *inshāʾ* piece sent to Yemen by Fatḥ al-Dīn); vol. 9:190-191 (a poem for al-Nāṣir Muḥammad's ascent of the throne by Shāfiʿ). Shāfiʿ is also referred to in vol. 8:389 as a prominent *adīb* of the period (squeezed in between Shihāb al-Dīn Maḥmūd and Ibn Sayyid al-Nās, both of whom are treated in much more detail), but none of his poetry is actually quoted here.

[50] *Kanz al-durar,* 8:60, 92, 99, 105, 177-178. This was used as an argument by al-Nāṣir to argue against the text's supposed title.

[51] The single part in which we can compare Ibn al-Dawādārī's copying of Ibn Shaddād's text is the part about the raid against Sīs in 673 / 1274: *Kanz al-durar,* 8:177-178; *Tārīkh al-Malik al-Ẓāhir*, 106-107.

[52] Guo, *Early Mamluk Syrian Historiography,* 62-63. See also the footnotes in Ibn Shaddād's *Tārīkh* in which the editor has regularly noted citations by al-Yūnīnī and other authors (which he sometimes uses to add information to the original text).

historians from this "school", such as Baybars al-Manṣūrī and Ibn al-Dawādārī, would also clearly fit with this Egyptian group.

Despite this observation, even among semi-contemporary Egyptian historians we find several historians who apparently made little or no use of Ibn ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir's work, let alone Shāfiʿ's. An interesting but telling contrast is found in al-Nuwayrī's *Nihāyat al-arab.* At a first glance it seems our authors, and Ibn ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir especially, are quite present in this massive text. In its chapter on "kingship", in the last massive subsection dealing with "the scribes and the eloquent ones",[53] there are a number of chapters with selected *inshāʾ* writings by six prominent *kuttāb,* starting with al-Qāḍī l-Fāḍil and ending with Tāj al-Dīn b. ʿAbd al-Majīd al-Yamānī (d. 743 / 1342-43), who worked in the *dīwān* in the early eighth / fourteenth century, i.e. when al-Nuwayrī worked in the financial chancery himself. Before the latter's texts however, two chapters are specifically devoted to writings by two authors from the Bānū ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir: Ibn ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir and his grandson ʿAlāʾ al-Dīn. This yields three official documents and a hunting epistle written by Ibn ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir (who is called "*al-qāḍī l-fāḍil al-bāriʿ al-aṣīl al-ajall*"),[54] and two letters, a *maqāma,* and a prose panegyric composed by ʿAlāʾ al-Dīn (who is initially named only "*al-mawlā al-mājid*", "the glorious master/patron").[55] While the choice for ʿAlāʾ al-Dīn b. ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir may have had something to do with contemporary clientelism, Ibn ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir had a few decades after his death clearly acquired a position of wide renown as an excellent *kātib.* However, while we are thus furnished with quite a bit of material on *inshāʾ, Nihāyat al-arab* also includes several volumes devoted exclusively to annalistic historiography. We have seen that ʿAlāʾ al-Dīn's battle treatise appears here and our authors also appear as poets and prose writers, but they are not listed as a major *historical* source for al-Nuwayrī here. Instead he seems to have relied primarily on Baybars al-Manṣūrī, al-Jazarī, al-Yūnīnī, and al-Birzālī for relating recent and contemporary history.[56] The spread between our authors' great renown as eloquent writers and their limited influence as historians was clearly already well in place in the early eighth / fourteenth century, with other slightly younger historians having superceded them as important historical sources.

If we move along in history, things do not improve with Ibn Kathīr (d. 774 / 1373). While he refers to Ibn ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir as Baybars' "*kātib*" near the end of an annalistic obituary for that sultan and adds that he wrote a "*sīra muṭawwala*" ("an elaborate *sīra*")

[53] See for a translated table of contents of al-Nuwayrī's vast work: E. Muhanna, *The World in a Book,* 145-152.
[54] *Nihāyat al-arab,* vol. 8:80-96.
[55] *Nihāyat al-arab,* vol. 8:96-114. Instead of naming him specifically at first, as he does with the other *kuttāb,* al-Nuwayrī here starts off with a rather extensive praise section running for the better part of two pages (that for his grandfather runs for one paragraph only, the one for al-Yamānī is of similar length), before eventually being named on the second page. As we have seen below, al-Nuwayrī and ʿAlāʾ al-Dīn knew each other personally, and this section implies that their relation may actually have been one of clientelism.
[56] Muhanna, *The World in a Book,* 70.

of Baybars as did ʿIzz al-Dīn b. Shaddād, he does not seem to have used these works as explicit sources in his massive work *al-Bidāya wa-l-nihāya.*[57] Instead, according to Donald Little, most of his information is taken from fellow Syrian historians al-Birzālī, al-Jazarī, and al-Yūnīnī.[58] In fact, this is apparently the only explicit reference to Ibn ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir throughout this entire massive work, which suggests that Ibn Kathīr was here probably only repeating a common appreciation of Ibn ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir's *sīra* without actually engaging with the text.

Things do change considerably when we turn to Ibn al-Furāt (d. 807/1405), one of the authors whose textual relationship with Ibn ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir has been better studied, and who is rather exceptional among contemporary historians for very often noting the origins of his quoted material. This rather obscure minor scholar of the late eighth / fourteenth century wrote an extensive chronicle called *Tārīkh al-duwal wa-l-mulūk,* which has been extensively mined by modern scholars. Ibn al-Furāt's chronicle has not been preserved in its entirety, and for the period covered by our authors we can only rely on the published first half of the sixth volume (years 660-664),[59] the seventh volume which deals with the years 672 until 682,[60] the eighth volume dealing with 682 until 696,[61] and the secondary study by Reuven Amitai on the still unedited second part of the Vienna manuscript (Staatsbibliothek 814), covering the years 664 until 671.[62] Fozia Bora has argued that Ibn al-Furāt's text should be considered as "a museum of texts", a "repository of reports", or even a "narrative of narratives", because of its almost exclusive concatenation of reports (the majority attributed to specific historians) with relatively little authorial intervention (at least in the earlier, non-contemporary history volumes). She even wonders whether the text may have been more of a preparation for a final text which would have summarised or harmonised the great variety of sources, as an actual fair copy (*mubayyaḍa*) of the text was apparently never produced.[63] Ibn ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir's reports from the *sīra* of Baybars reproduced by Ibn al-Furāt, are thus but one among many. Bora shows that Ibn al-Furāt's selections in general are quite kaleidoscopic, allowing for the co-existence of different historiographical evaluations of events and persons in the same book, "[appearing] to aim at offering a broad-based narrative that preserves, presents, and suggests patterns in, earlier historiography", an

[57] Ibn Kathīr, *al-Bidāya wa-l-nihāya,* vol. 17:535. Notably, there is no obituary for our author himself.
[58] Little, *An Introduction to Mamlūk Historiography,* 69-70.
[59] Ibn al-Furāt, *Tārīkh Ibn al-Furāt, vol. 6.1.,* ed. Mīkhāʾīl Khūrī (Unpublished MA thesis, American University of Beirut, 1961).
[60] Ibn al-Furāt, *Tārīkh Ibn al-Furāt, vol. 7.*
[61] Ibn al-Furāt, *Tārīkh Ibn al-Furāt, vol. 8.*
[62] Amitai, "Al-Maqrīzī as a Historian of the Early Mamluk Sultanate (or: Is al-Maqrīzī an Unrecognized Historiographical Villain?)" *MSR* 7/2 (2003), 100-118.
[63] F. Bora, "A Mamluk Historian's Holograph: Messages from a *Musawwada* of *Taʾrīkh*", *Journal of Islamic Manuscripts* 3 (2012), 119-153.

approach she calls "showcasing".[64] This results for example in Ibn ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir's report on the death of Baybars being related (unattributed) after contradictory reports by al-Yūnīnī and unnamed "others".[65] For the earlier years of Baybars' sultanate it seems that Ibn al-Furāt relied more extensively on Ibn ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir's *sīra,* as Reuven Amitai has shown.

In general, while including a relatively high amount of "historiographical" excerpts taken from Ibn ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir without attribution, especially in the partly unpublished sixth volume discussed by Amitai, it is interesting to note that, like his predecessors, most of the material Ibn al-Furāt explicitly attributed to our author in the published volume is in fact again poetical[66] and documentary.[67] While Ibn ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir is rather consistently named as *muʾallif sīrat al-Malik al-Ẓāhir* ("the author of the *sīra* of al-Malik al-Ẓāhir [Baybars]"), not all of the quoted material in these instances is directly related to that *sīra*. A *taqlīd* written for the appointment of al-Ṣāliḥ ʿAlī as co-sultan under Qalāwūn may have been taken from *Tashrīf al-ayyām*'s non-surviving first part, but that work is never mentioned by name nor is its existence referred to. Similarly, it is unknown where a letter sent to Yemen and written by our author was taken from,[68] as is some of the poetical material, which is not always directly found in *al-Rawḍ al-zāhir*. Two excerpts are especially interesting, as they are noted as being derived from Ibn ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir *and* Shāfiʿ b. ʿAlī. The first of these deals with bad management by the amir Badr al-Dīn al-Khazindār, which is not traceable to any of the relevant texts of our authors,[69] the other is the account of Baybars' burial including a selection of short poems, which is found verbatim in *al-Rawḍ al-zāhir,* but not at all in *Ḥusn al-manāqib*.[70] These are in fact the only instances in which Ibn al-Furāt refers to Shāfiʿ. Considering the textual evidence we have, this information is difficult to interpret: did Ibn al-Furāt mean that both authors gave this information in separate works, that another abridgement of Ibn ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir's work by Shāfiʿ existed,[71] or that another non-abridging work by Shāfiʿ included information attributed to Ibn ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir?

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[64] Bora, "A Mamluk Historian's Holograph", 134.
[65] Ibn al-Furāt, *Tārīkh Ibn al-Furāt,* 7:87-89.
[66] Ibn al-Furāt, *Tārīkh Ibn al-Furāt*, 7:31-32, 50-51, 90-92 (the elegy for the death of Baybars referred to in chapter 4), 115 (3 lines, in the context of a memorial service for Baybars, not clear taken from where), 143; 8:113, 114 (two poems for the conquest of Acre).
[67] Ibn al-Furāt, *Tārīkh Ibn al-Furāt*, 7:24, 51-53, 187-190, 223-225; 8:148-150. These volumes also contain several *inshāʾ* pieces written by Fatḥ al-Dīn b. ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir: 7:177-179, 179, 180-181, 191-192, 192-195; 8:65-67.
[68] Ibn al-Furāt, *Tārīkh Ibn al-Furāt*, 7:187-190, 223-225.
[69] Shāfiʿ does note that he wrote a letter in the service of this Badr al-Dīn informing al-Saʿīd Bereke of Baybars' death at the end of *Ḥusn al-manāqib,* 342.
[70] *Rawḍ,* 475. The editor al-Khuwayṭir even used Ibn al-Furāt's quotation to finish the last sentence of the manuscript, cut off by the Istanbul manuscript's defective ending.
[71] Ibn al-Furāt notes at one point that there existed two *sīra*'s of Baybars, but he explicitly names the second as ʿIzz al-Dīn b. Shaddād's. *Tārīkh Ibn al-Furāt*, 7:83.

The general image we get from Ibn al-Furāt's quoting of Ibn ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir, is thus still very much one of an author predominantly interested in our authors as *udabāʾ* and *kuttāb,* writers of excellent poetry and documentary prose. Although he did indeed extensively copy historical material from the *sīra*'s, it is significant that, like earlier historians, exactly this material was not usually specifically attributed to our author, as if Ibn al-Furāt saw these quotes as bearing less of Ibn ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir's "authorial" mark than the poetical and documentary writings. Furthermore, despite Ibn al-Furāt's wide-ranging reading and copying from a great number of now lost historical sources, he apparently did not come across any of Shāfiʿ's known works, nor did he consult Ibn ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir's other *sīra*'s, none of which seem to have circulated very widely.

We have seen that material evidence for the manuscript of *al-Faḍl al-maʾthūr* does point to a decent degree of circulation, even up to al-Maqrīzī himself, but this apparently did not translate into the circulation of the narratives contained within that text. Of course, al-Maqrīzī is rather notorious for not consistently naming his sources (he never names Ibn al-Furāt as his main source for seventh / thirteenth century history, for example) so he may have made use of Shāfiʿ b. ʿAlī's text in an as yet to be discovered place. Jo Van Steenbergen has for example argued that al-Maqrīzī did copy the reports about Baybars' secret *ḥajj* in his *al-Dhahab al-masbūk fī man ḥajja min al-mulūk,* possibly directly from Ibn ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir's *sīra* of Baybars.[72] Van Steenbergen suggests that one of the reasons that al-Maqrīzī did not acknowledge his copying of this information is that Ibn ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir's narrative had by this time become "dominant and well-known" and thus did not need to be named.[73] Considering the ways in which Ibn al-Furāt and preceding historians had been making use of Ibn ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir's work, al-Maqrīzī's lack of attribution was in fact not uncommon, as the "authorial" attribution of these passages may simply have appeared irrelevant to him.

If al-Maqrīzī's reliance on the *sīra* as a historical work still remains a bit of a question mark, he did certainly make extensive (and acknowledged) use of Ibn ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir's geographical work *al-Rawḍa l-bahiyya fī khiṭaṭ al-Qāhira al-Muʿizziyya* in one of his other well known works, *al-Mawāʾiẓ al-iʿtibār fī dhikr khiṭaṭ wa-l-athār.* Indeed, the edition of Ibn ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir's work, of which only a fraction survives in manuscript form, is based in large part on quotations from the book by al-Maqrīzī, al-Qalqashandī, and others.[74]

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[72] Van Steenbergen does not refer to the possibility of a copying by way of Ibn al-Furāt (the relevant part is found in Ibn al-Furāt, *Tārīkh al-duwal wa-l-mulūk,* Vienna, Staatsbibliothek Cod. AF 122, 75v-77r.), whose account is once more "kaleidoscopic", concatenating several reports. A cursory reading does thus point more in the direction of a direct link between *Rawḍ* and *al-Dhahab al-masbūk* rather than an intermediary link with Ibn al-Furāt's more disjointed narrative.

[73] Van Steenbergen, *Caliphate and Kingship,* 88.

[74] bn ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir, *al-Rawḍa l-bahiyya l-zāhira fī khiṭaṭ al-Muʿizziyya l-Qāhira,* ed. Ayman Fuʾād Sayyid (Cairo: al-Dār al-ʿarabiyya li-l-kutub, 1996). See also the discussion in Ayman Fuʿad Sayyid, "L'évolution de la

Furthermore, al-Maqrīzī does name Ibn ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir as "*ṣāḥib al-sīra al-ẓāhiriyya*" ("the author of the *sīra* of al-Ẓāhir [Baybars]") in an obituary devoted to our author in his biographical dictionary *al-Muqaffāʾ al-kabīr,* so he was clearly aware of the *sīra*'s existence.[75] However, this type of information seems to have been commonly rendered in obituaries and biographical entries (see also Ibn Kathīr's evaluation mentioned above), without it necessarily meaning that the author of the entry was familiar with the contents of the work. Similar information is also given by the late historians al-Sakhāwī (d. 902 / 1497) in his historic-theoretical work *al-Iʿlān bi-l-tawbīkh li-man dhamma ahl al-tawrīkh*,[76] and in an obituary in Jalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūṭī's (d. 911 / 1505) *Ḥusn al-muḥāḍara fī tārīkh Miṣr wa-l-Qāhira*.[77] For Shāfiʿ things are even worse: al-Maqrīzī does note him as an *adīb* who wrote many works and good poetry and prose, but he does not quote him explicitly at any point as far as I am aware, and al-Suyūṭī does not seem to have been aware of (or cared for) his existence.[78]

Al-Maqrīzī's contemporary Badr al-Dīn al-ʿAynī (d. 855 / 1453) presents an interesting case of historiographical patchworking in his dealing with the period of Baybars' sultanate, and especially that sultan's death, but it is once more significant that he did not make use of our authors' texts in doing so. Instead, he relied extensively (and explicitly) on Baybars al-Manṣūrī's *Zubdat al-fikra,* much of which he reproduces verbatim, and to a lesser extent Ibn Kathīr. We thus get a highly similar picture of Ibn ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir's poetical and official prose activities as that given more than a century earlier – al-ʿAynī even reproduces the edict granting an *iqṭāʿ* to Baybars al-Manṣūrī. However, when discussing the death of Baybars, al-ʿAynī does more than simply reproduce Baybars al-Manṣūrī, he adds a relatively lengthy but highly interesting section which is only partly based on Baybars al-Manṣūrī, a sort of portrait of the sultan in "several qualities" ("*ʿalā anwāʿ*"). The seven qualities discussed are his "*tarjama*" ("biography", detailing life events), "*ṣifa*" ("characteristics", but amounts to a short physical description), "*sīra*" (which deals with virtues and ideal rule, quotes a lyrical paragraph from al-Nuwayrī, and adds Ibn Kathīr's evaluation about Ibn ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir's and Ibn Shaddād's *sīra*'s noted above), "*futūḥāt*" ("conquests"), "*ʿamāʾir*" ("building activities), "*wafāt*" ("death"), "*muddat al-salṭana*" ("period of his sultanate"), and a last

composition du genre de khiṭaṭ en Egypte musulmane" in *The Historiography of Islamic Egypt, ca. 950-1800,* ed. H. Kennedy (Leiden: Brill, 2001), 83-84.

[75] Al-Maqrīzī, *al-Muqaffāʾ al-kabīr,* vol. 4:579. By contrast, in his most well-known historical work *al-Sulūk fī maʿrifat duwal al-mulūk,* we only find an obituary where he is named, given a date of death and named as *al-kātib, lisān dīwān al-inshāʾ* ("the *kātib,* the tongue of the composition bureau"). *Al-Sulūk li-maʿrifat duwal al-mulūk,* ed. Muḥammad ʿAbd al-Qādir ʿAṭā (Beirut: Dār al-kutub al-ʿilmiyya, 1997), vol. 2:243.

[76] Translated in F. Rosenthal, *A History of Muslim Historiography,* 412. The work is listed in a short chapter about *sīra*'s written throughout Islamic history, notably again in the same breath as Ibn Shaddād's.

[77] al-Suyūṭī, *Ḥusn al-muḥāḍara fī tārīkh Miṣr wa-l-Qāhira,* ed. Muḥammad Abū l-Faḍl Ibrāhīm (Cairo: Dār iḥyāʾ al-kutub al-ʿarabiyya, 1967), vol. 1:570. The *sīra* is the only work of Ibn ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir referred to directly here.

[78] *Sulūk,* ed. ʿAṭā 3:136;

section listing his children and several elegies, the first of which is the ten-line version of Ibn ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir's elegy.[79] While al-ʿAynī does not rely on either of our authors' works for this section, it is interesting for its evaluation of *sīra* as denoting virtues and the broad category of ideal rule, which should be presented in a literary register, as is evident from the rhymed cadenced prose paragraph he explicitly quotes from al-Nuwayrī. This evaluation is furthermore interesting because al-ʿAynī himself wrote at least two panegyric works which he called *sīra*'s himself, one of which even bears the title *al-Rawḍ al-zāhir fī sīrat al-Malik al-Ẓāhir [Ṭaṭar].*[80] It is unclear how consciously the author was connecting the title of this work to those of Ibn ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir and ʿIzz al-Dīn b. Shaddād, both of which have been referred to by historians by this exact same name, but it is in any case clear from the work that for al-ʿAynī the *meaning* of *sīra* was considerably different, as his panegyric works indicate a quite different, more "encyclopaedic" approach to those of our authors.[81]

Al-Maqrīzī's student Ibn Taghrī-Birdī (d. 884 / 1470) was more diligent in naming his sources than his teacher, and we can thus assess more readily whence he took his information. From the lemma's devoted to the four sultans about whom our author wrote *sīra*'s in his biographical dictionary *al-Manhal al-ṣāfī,* it becomes clear that Ibn Taghrī-Birdī continued the practice of his time in making no explicit use of our texts. By contrast, he does explicitly note quoting information from various other historians we have already come across: Baybars al-Manṣūrī,[82] al-Nuwayrī,[83] al-Ṣafadī,[84] Ibn Kathīr,[85] al-Dhahabī,[86] and Ibn Ḥabīb.[87] Our authors were not forgotten, as they do make appearances as poets and *kuttāb* (though not via quoted documents) and even receive lemma's themselves, but they were clearly not included amongst the notable historians whose accounts were widely read and reproduced. It is interesting to note that, while our authors are almost never quoted within the lemmata for sultans they served or wrote about themselves,[88] we do find several excerpts of poetry written by Shihāb al-Dīn Maḥmūd in those very lemmata.[89] The picture is roughly similar for the same author's annalistic dynastic chronicle *al-Nujūm al-zāhira*, although the narratives are much more

[79] al-ʿAynī, *ʿIqd al-jumān,* 2:174-184.

[80] Edited by F.M. Shaltūt (Cairo: Dār al-kātib al-ʿarabī li-l-ṭibāʿa wa-l-nashr, 1967). The other work is entitled *al-Sayf al-muhannad fī* ***sīrat*** *al-Malik al-Muʾayyad,* ed. H. Ernst (Cairo: Dār iḥyāʾ al-kutub al-ʿarabiyya, 1962).

[81] For an overview of their contents, see P.M. Holt, "Literary Offerings", 8-12.

[82] Ibn Taghrī-Birdī, *al-Manhal al-ṣāfī,* 3:463.

[83] Idem, 5:279 (lemma for al-Ashraf Khalīl).

[84] Idem, 5:279-280.

[85] Idem, 3:454 (about Baybars); 9:96 (about Qalāwūn); 10:276-277 (about al-Nāṣir Muḥammad, an anecdote which appears in different form in Shāfiʿ's *sīra*)

[86] Idem, 3:464; 5:271-272, 276-277; 10:269-270.

[87] Idem, 5:279.

[88] One short poem by Ibn ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir does appear in the lemma for Baybars: idem, 3:459.

[89] Idem, 3:457, 461; 9:94; 10:272, 274.

extensive here. He does at least at one point quote information taken from ʿIzz al-Dīn b. Shaddād,[90] but here too his major sources as noted by Donald Little do not include either of our authors,[91] nor do they appear much as poets and *kuttāb.*

As one of the last historians of the Mamluk period, Ibn Iyas's (d. ca 930 / 1524) chronicle *Badāʾiʿ al-zuhūr fī waqāʾiʿ al-duhūr* does not bring much change to the picture outlined above. If we take Baybars' reign as a reference again, his explicit sources seem to have been Abū Shāma and al-Dhahabī.[92] I have only come across one reference to Ibn ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir when he quotes the ten-line version of his elegy for Baybars which had already been reproduced from Baybars al-Manṣūrī to al-ʿAynī.[93] He also reproduces the *khuṭba* (which is called "*balīgha*", "eloquent") for the reinstatement of the caliphate in Cairo, supposedly written by Ibn ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir, but does not identify its author.[94] Similarly, several epigrams are quoted but not attributed to a specific poet.

There are of course more historians who were active in the Mamluk period, but as this is not the core part of the research of this dissertation I have only undertaken a brief survey of major historians of the period. The general image is clearly one in which our authors were not very widely read, let alone reproduced as historians. Those early authors who did make use of their works to various degrees (Baybars al-Manṣūrī, Ibn al-Furāt, perhaps al-Yūnīnī) would effectively supplant them as primary sources for later historians. Furthermore, and what is perhaps more important than whether or not some historians reproduced information from the *sīra*'s, is that they did not primarily evaluate our authors as historians, but predominantly as poets and *kuttāb*. When they explicitly quoted them, this was almost always in the context of a quoted poem or document, and only very seldomly for historical accounts. This is most clearly visible in the work of Ibn al-Furāt, who did actually quote a good deal of material from Ibn ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir's *sīra* of Baybars and referred to him throughout as writer of that *sīra*, but only specifically attributed poetic and documentary material to him.

If we move beyond the Mamluk period, it becomes clear that the memory of our authors as historians did not go through a revival. The important sixteenth century Ottoman scholar Aḥmad b. Muṣṭafā Ṭāshköprüzade for example did not make any reference to either author in his section on historical knowledge, *ʿilm al-tawārīkh* in his encyclopaedic overview of various knowledge domains, *Miftāh al-saʿāda wa-miṣbāḥ al-*

[90] Ibn Taghrī-Birdī, *al-Nujūm al-zāhira,* 7:95-96.
[91] Little, *An Introduction to Mamlūk Historiography,* 89.
[92] Ibn Iyās, *Badāʾiʿ al-zuhūr fī waqāʾiʿ al-duhūr,* ed. M. Mustafa (Wiesbaden: Franz Steiner, 1975), vol. 1:316, 317, 321, 324, 337.
[93] Idem, 1:339. Judging by a comment by Donald Little about Ibn Iyās's probable use of al-ʿAynī for an episode from the early eighth / thirteenth century, I assume he must have taken this information also from al-ʿAynī. Little, *An Introduction to Mamlūk Historiography,* 93.
[94] Ibn Iyās, *Badāʾiʿ al-zuhūr,* 1:315-316.

siyāda fī mawḍūʿāt al-ʿulūm.[95] Of course, Ṭāshköprüzade's is not an exhaustive survey, and things do improve when we turn to Kātip Çelebi / Ḥajjī Khalīfa's (d. 1068 / 1657) alphabetically organised *Kashf al-ẓunūn ʿan asāmī l-kutub wa-l-funūn,* which I have referred to above in 4.1 as a reference for book titles. Çelebi identifies Ibn ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir as the author of *al-Rawḍ al-zāhir* and *al-Rawḍa l-bahiyya* (the geographical work on Cairo which has been partly preserved),[96] as well as a *Sīrat al-Malik al-Ẓāhir,* which must refer to the same work as *al-Rawḍ al-zāhir.* However next to the reference to this *Sīrat al-Malik al-Ẓāhir,* he also identifies two further *sīra*'s: *Sīrat al-Malik al-Manṣūr Qalāwūn* and *Sīrat al-Ashraf b. Qalāwūn,* presumably referring to *Tashrīf al-ayyām* and *al-Alṭāf al-khafiyya.* However, the Ottoman scholar ascribes both these later works to al-Qāḍī l-Fāḍil ʿAbd al-Raḥīm b. ʿAlī al-Bīsānī al-Miṣrī, that is, the famous al-Qāḍī l-Fāḍil (d. 596 / 1200) who served as Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn's vizier, and could thus impossibly be the author of these works.[97] The confusion may result from the fact that Ibn ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir was regularly given the same honorific as al-Bīsānī by later historians, but it may also suggest that these two later books were not widely available by the time Çelebi compiled his work and that listing them in his work was based not on actually seeing the works but reading or even only hearing about them. Indeed, Shāfiʿ's works, manuscript copies of which certainly still circulated at the time, were not even acknowledged at all – unless in the unlikely case that he is the one identified as al-Qāḍī l-Fāḍil.[98] Furthermore, unlike some other historical works the contents of which are briefly described, Ibn ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir's works are only listed with the author's name and date of death, again suggesting that they were mostly included for comprehensiveness' sake.

Despite their towering ambitions, it seems that in the eyes of contemporary and especially later historians, our authors were relatively minor historians. Whereas their poetry and some of their prose remained circulating for quite some time, and Ibn ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir's name would even pop up now and then in later Ottoman contexts, it seems that his renown too dramatically diminished, unlike that of some other historians of the period. That modern research has devoted such a relatively high amount of attention to these authors is thus somewhat strange from that historical point of view, although it is not anomalous when considering the modern historical interest in general – historians such as Ibn al-Dawādārī, al-Mufaḍḍal b. Abī l-Faḍāʾil and Ibn al-Furāt were not or hardly referred to in contemporary biographical literature but loom comparably large in

[95] Ṭāshköprüzade, *Miftāh al-saʿāda wa-miṣbāḥ al-siyāda fī mawḍūʿāt al-ʿulūm* (Beirut: Dār al-kutub al-ʿilmiyya, 1985), vol. 1:231-246.
[96] *Kashf al-ẓunūn,* 1:919, 925.
[97] *Kashf al-ẓunūn,* vol. 2:1012.
[98] Unlikely because nobody accorded him that epithet, as they did for Ibn ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir. By contrast, Badr al-Dīn al-ʿAynī's two panegyrical "*sīra*'s" of al-Ẓāhir Ṭaṭar and al-Muʿayyad Shaykh are listed, as is ʿIzz al-Dīn b. Shaddād's *tārīkh* (listed as *sīra*). *Kashf al-ẓunun,* vol. 2:38.

modern historical research on the period. To understand this remarkable divergence, at least in the case of our two authors, we must turn to the European circulation and reception of these works, which elucidate the reasons for their modern stature and the fact that Haarmann quite anachronistically called some of these texts among the "most important sources for the early Mamluk period".

7.2.2 "Their History and Geography we most want": Early modern European audiences

Of the seven known manuscripts of the six texts in our corpus, only one is preserved in a non-European library (namely in Istanbul). If we add ʿIzz al-Dīn b. Shaddād's *Tārīkh al-Malik al-Ẓāhir* to the corpus, the picture becomes slightly more balanced as this text's single known manuscript is held in Edirne, but all the other manuscripts are in European institutions and several have been held there for centuries. When taking the general practices of collection of Arabic and Islamic manuscripts in Europe into account, however, this seemingly remarkable observation is in fact not that surprising after all. Consider this quote from the English scholar of Arabic Simon Ockley (d. 1720) in a letter in which he considered the Arabic manuscript holdings of the Bodleian library in Oxford:

> We have enough of their Grammar, Poetry, mahometan Questions and Decisions, but what is of the Greatest Moment, their History and Geography[,] we most want.[99]

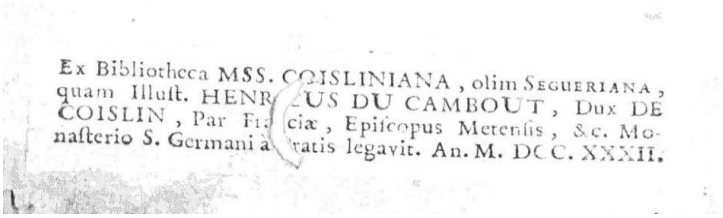
Of course the subjects Ockley most desired to read about were given in by his own scholarly inclinations: he wrote one of the first European histories of the Arab conquests and was thus especially interested in historiographical information. But at the same time, his comment may be considered representative of a general western attitude towards Arabic written culture, in which we have given disproportionate attention to historiography, despite it never having been the dominant type of writing in pre-modern Islamicate societies.[100] Alexander Bevilacqua, from whose recent monograph *The Republic of Arabic Letters* I lifted the quote, has charted the wide range of European efforts in the early modern period to stock personal and institutional libraries

[99] The letter is preserved in Copenhagen but quoted in A. Bevilacqua, *The Republic of Arabic Letters: Islam and the European Enlightenment* (Cambridge, MA & London: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2018), 42.
[100] Robinson, *Islamic Historiography*, 112.

with Arabic and Islamic manuscripts. His insights add some important nuances to the typical image or early modern orientalism and hightlighted a variety of individual and common interests among scholars. What is in any case clear, is that the transfer of manuscripts from the early modern Middle East and North Africa towards Europe and somewhat later North America was a large scale, though disjointed operation which influenced the ways in which modern scholars have looked at Arabic textual practices to a significant degree, if only as a result of matters of availability.

This section will, as far as possible, follow such manuscript travels for the corpus of *sīra*'s and discuss how they were acquired and integrated in European collections. I will also evaluate how European audiences engaged with the contents of these texts. Unfortunately, for the few Arabic notes that we have, Europeans left even fewer marks on these texts, and some of those that do appear are again more baffling than enlightening.

Two of the three *sīra*'s preserved in the Bibliothèque Nationale de France have been in Europe at least since the mid-seventeenth century. Shāfiʿ's *sīra* of al-Nāṣir Muḥammad (Arabe 1705) and Ibn ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir's *Tashrīf al-ayyām* (Arabe 1704) both have a label attached to the manuscripts — the one reproduced below is from Arabe 1705 — which tells us that the manuscripts were bequeathed to the library of the Abbey of Saint-Germain-des-Prés by Henri[-Charles] du Cambou[s]t, duke of Coislin, upon his death in 1732 – I am not sure whether the attaching of the labels themselves should also be situated in that period, the typeset does come across as more modern. In any case, Henri Du Camboust had himself inherited the collection from his great-grandfather the French chancellor Pierre Séguier (d. 1672). It is not unlikely that Séguier was the first European owner of these texts, as he (indirectly) employed at least two persons to acquire manuscripts in the east: the priest Athanase Rhetor who had earlier collected manuscripts in Greece and Cyprus for the cardinal Mazarin (d. 1661) and who was later patronised by Séguier, and the capuchin priest Elzéar (اليعازر) who lived in Cairo. Séguier employed the latter by way of a Marseilles-based merchant with a trading post in Cairo.[101] Additionally, several of Séguier's manuscripts were apparently also bought by Antoine Galland in Turkey, so it is difficult to establish with any certainty who acquired these particular manuscripts and


Ex Bibliotheca MSS. COISLINIANA, olim SEGUERIANA, quam Illuſt. HENR[ICUS] DU CAMBOUT, Dux DE COISLIN, Par Fr[anciæ], Epiſcopus Metenſis, &c. Monaſterio S. Germani a[Pratis] legavit. An. M. DCC. XXXII.

BnF Arabe 1705, folio 1r.

[101] Y. Nexon, "La bibliothèque de chancelier Séguier", in *Histoire des bibliothèques françaises, vol. 2: Les Bibliothèques sous l'Ancien Régime (1530-1789),* ed. C. Jolly (Paris: Editions du Cercle de la Librairie – Promodis, 1988), 149.

where.[102] Elzéar seems to me the most likely candidate considering his geographical activities in Egypt, where these manuscripts were originally written. He actually composed a Latin catalogue of some of the more prominent Arabic manuscripts in Séguier's collection, but neither of the two *sīra*'s of these at that point almost entirely forgotten rulers were included.[103]

Arabe 1704 (*Tashrīf al-ayyām*) contains a two-page description in French written by Dom Berthereau (d. 1794) at the Abbey of Saint-Germain-des-Prés some time between 1732 and 1789.[104] Although the description is not explicitly dated, it is preceded by the old shelfmark "118 bis" and says that "cette vie de Kelavun nest pas a la bibliotheque du roi" — which suggests that it must have been written before the deposal of the monarchy in 1789 and the subsequent renaming of the royal library to Bibliothèque Nationale in 1792.[105] One of the aspects Berthereau focuses on is the text's inclusion of various documents:

> Cette vie est tres detaillée et ce que je nai vu dans aucune autre historie, on y trouve tout au long des diplomes ou traités de paix et de commerces avec des remarques de lauteur sur la singularité des scrivants et des signatures, scavoir avec les templiers et hospitaliers, les francs de s. jean dacre, la reine de saide les rois de chipre, de sicile et darragon; plus des letters apportées par des ambassadeurs et les reponses.[106]

Note that the author only specifically refers to those letters that may be connected to Latin-European states and political entities, likely given in by the fact that Berthereau was extremely interested in the period of the crusades and from that angle even convinced the major French orientalist Antoine Isaac Silvestre de Sacy (d. 1838) to study Arabic.[107] By contrast, the for Arabic audiences highly important correspondence with the Mongols which I have discussed above (see 6.2.1.1.) is only abstractly discussed, by way of the remark about the "singularité des scrivants et des signatures", i.e. the

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[102] S. Roman, *The Development of Islamic Library Collections in Western Europe and North America* (London/New York: Mansell, 1990), 86.

[103] F. Elzearius, *Catalogus Librorum qui Arabice Manuscripti in Bibliotheca illustrissimi Domini D. Petri Seguier Supremi Regis Regnique Galliae Cancellarii Asservantur,* Paris: BnF Arabe 4483.

[104] The author is identified by the BnF catalogue, https://archivesetmanuscrits.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/cc29654m

[105] MS Arabe 1704, folio 0v. On the transformation of the library, see: P.M. Priebe, "From Bibliothèque du Roi to Bibliothèque Nationale: The Creation of a State Library, 1789–1793", *The Journal of Library History (1974-1987)*. 17/4 (1982), 389–408.

[106] BnF Arabe 1704, folio 0r.

[107] R. Irwin, "Orientalism and the Early Development of Crusader Studies", in *The Experience of Crusading. Vol2: Defining the Crusader Kingdom,* eds. P. Edbury & J. Phillips (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 219-220.

author's remarks about the formal layout of the letters, which, as I have also discussed, in fact only appears with those Mongol letters. We can also see this in marginal comments added to the main text: on the folio's where the peace treaty with the templars of Antartus is quoted, a hand that also seems to be Berthereau's has highlighted that this is the "pax cum templariis antarsous" and a notice that this happened in "an 681".[108] Similar notes are found on a short passage detailing the Cypriot king's dealings with Acre and a longer letter sent to Alfonso of Aragon.[109] The same hand has also highlighted the changes in years (or reminders of the year) in French.[110] On another page a different hand has written "vita Mancouri Aegypti et Syria regis", thus identifying the text's general contents.[111] On one page there are also some notes which seem to be translations of words, possibly written by someone who was teaching himself Arabic.[112] It seems then that some early modern European scholars approached the text as a container of useful information on interactions between states from the Latin West and Qalāwūn. Not unlike the Arabic notes simply stating "*waqf*" and "*salṭanat Baybars*" mentioned above, this highlighting of information contained in the Arabic text was a way of opening up this relatively closed world of information to a broader potential readership. The interest in the other documents included in the text was however soon picked up, as the French orientalist Marc-Étienne Quatremère (more on him below) included an edition and translation of most of the diplomatic documents found in the text as an appendix to the third volume of his widely read *Histoire des sultans mamlouks*, a partial translation of al-Maqrīzī's *al-Sulūk* published between 1837 and 1845.[113] In doing so, he definitively brought this text to a wider audience, but consolidated its common evaluation as a text that is mostly valuable as a container of diplomatic material.

Arabe 1704 is by far the most extensively glossed text by European audiences, but the other manuscripts in the Bibliothèque Nationale de France also show some European engagements, though both probably only added after they ended up in the Bibliothèque Nationale. Arabe 1705 (*Sīrat al-Nāṣir Muḥammad*) also contains a short French description of the contents, in which it is suggested that the text might be another part of the text that is now Arabe 1704. Unlike that earlier text, however, this note is likely from the 19th

[108] MS Arabe 1704, folio's 38v-44r. It is interesting to note that this date is not translated to a European date. The information is repeated on every page, though with slight variations, and in some cases with an addition I do not entirely understand but which may denote a reference to a parallel Latin version of the same text.
[109] MS Arabe 1704, folio's 95v-96r & 316r-338r.
[110] MS Arabe 1704, folio's 39r, 42r, 69r, 80r, 144r, 148r.
[111] BnF Arabe 1704, folio 61v.
[112] BnF Arabe 1704, folio 238r.
[113] Taki-Eddin-Ahmed-Makrizi, *Histoire des sultans mamlouks, troisième partie,* tr. M. Quatremère (Paris: 1845), 158-235. See for further editions and translations, Pfeiffer, "Aḥmad Tegüder's Second Letter to Qalā'ūn", 171 n. 18.

century, as it is written in a spelling that is close to modern French and refers to the other text by its previous shelf mark in the Bibliothèque Nationale and not by its shelf mark from Saint-Germain-des-Prés. In addition to the label noted above detailing its provenance its title page also carries a Latin translation of the (mistaken) title "Chronolog. Reg. Arabii" in a handwriting that I would also guess to be from the 19th century on the title page, as well as a bold sign reading "C·6", the provenance of which I have not yet discovered.

Arabe 1707 (Shāfiʿ's *Ḥusn al-manāqib*) does not bear a label attesting to an origin in the library of Saint-Germain-des-Prés, so it might have originated elsewhere. It does contain a basic Latin description of the text, but this was probably written some time in the nineteenth century when the text was already part of the Bibliothèque Nationale.[114] It describes the contents as:

> vita et mores Almalek al Dhaher Bibars Mamlucorum Turcarum in Egypto Regis, qui anno hegirae 658 regnare coepit et ab insignes de Tartaris, Armenis et Francis reportatas victorias, Saheb al-fotouhat, sive victor et Triumphator cognominatus est.[115]

The author of this note also identifies the author and notes the writing date of the colophon. The identification of the work as "vita et mores" ("life and customs") is quite interesting in itself as this was a phrase typically used for biographical writing in early modern Europe, in which the association between life-writing and exemplarity inherited from Latin Antiquity and hagiographical practices was very strong.[116] The author thus evaluated the work as in many ways similar to regnal biographies written in the European tradition, an appreciation that would have some influence on how later authors would read these texts.

The manuscript of *al-Alṭāf al-khafiyya,* now held by the Staatsbibliothek in Munich, also has a French connection. It was acquired by the (then) Royal Library of Munich as part of the French orientalist Étienne Marc Quatremère's personal library in 1858.[117]

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[114] I am grateful to David Chelli and Belinda McGrath Witzenhausen from the Paleography Society group on Facebook for their advice on the dating of this note.
[115] BnF Arabe 1707, 0v.
[116] As one example among many, M. McLaughlin names the mid-14th century text *De vita et moribus Francisci Petracchi* as typical of "individual biographies", one of three strands of biographical works he distinguishes in the Italian Renaissance, "Biography and Autobiography in the Italian Renaissance", in *Mapping Lives: The Uses of Biography,* eds. P. France & W. St Clair (Oxford/New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 38.
[117] Aumer, *Die Arabischen Handschriften der Königlichen Hof- und Staatsbibliothek München* (Munich: Palm, 1866), 159. See for a short general discussion of this acquisition: Bayerische Staatsbibliothek München, "History of the Arabic Collection", in *https://www.bsb-muenchen.de/en/collections/orient/languages/arabic/#c4423* See also T. Seidensticker, "How Arabic Manuscripts Moved to German Libraries", in *Manuscript Cultures,* 10 (2017), 77.

However, the latter likely did not own the manuscript for very long, as he seems to have acquired it himself from another contemporary French orientalist, Jean-Joseph Marcel, who died in 1854 himself. *Al-Alṭāf al-khafiyya* is thus understandably absent from Quatremère's footnotes for his influential *Histoire des Sultans Mamlouks,* which as noted above had been published already earlier. Marcel for his part does claim to have used the work as one of the sources for his *Histoire de l'Égypte depuis la conquête des Arabes jusqu'à celle des Français,* an introductory volume to the more famous *Histoire scientifique et militaire de l'expédition française en Égypte* (1830-1834). In his introduction to *Histoire de l'Égypte* he notes that his chronographic narrative:

> est fidèlement extrait des auteurs arabes dont la plupart sont inédits et font partie du précieux trésor de manuscrits que j'ai pu recueillir en Égypte, et qui, au nombre de plus de deux mille, enrichissent ma bibliothèque.[118]

Marcel had, like Quatremère himself, studied Arabic with the pioneering French orientalist Silvestre De Sacy, and accompanied Napoleon's conquest of Egypt as director of a small contingent of printers and as military interpreter. Although he does not discuss the actual provenance of his manuscripts in more detail, Marcel does in the following pages of his introduction spend some time on the author Ibn ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir, claiming that he is not described by any Arabic biographer, and noting especially that the text contains "un grand nombre de pièces officielles".[119] Despite this attention given to the text, I have not found a trace of source material taken from this text in the two paragraphs Marcel devotes to al-Ashraf Khalīl's reign.[120] It is interesting to note that Marcel's other sources as listed in his introduction are also all Middle Period historians (the earliest of them being Bahāʾ al-Dīn b. Shaddād) and that he claims to have had no need to study earlier historians, as "their extracts are found faithfully copied, as is the custom of oriental writers, in the works of the later historians whose works I have in my hands".[121]

The Munich manuscript does contain a note with a basic description of the text in French. However, based on palaeographic comparison, it seems to have been written

[118] J-J. Marcel, *Histoire de l'Égypte depuis la conquête des Arabes jusqu'à celle des Français* (Paris: H. Dupuy, 1834), vi.
[119] Idem, xiv-xv.
[120] Idem, 365-366. The paragraphs deal mostly with the conquest of Acre and the sultan's murder, both of which are not discussed in the surviving part of *al-Alṭāf al-khafiyya*.
[121] Idem, xxvi. "Je n'ai aucun besoin de consulter les historiens antérieurs à ceux que comprend cette Notice; leurs extraits se trouvaient fidèlement copiés, suivant la coutume des écrivains orientaux, dans les ouvrages des historiens postérieurs que j'avais entre les mains."

neither by Quatremère, nor by Jean-Joseph Marcel.[122] In 1866, relatively shortly after the acquisition of Quatremère's collection in Munich, Joseph Aumer published a catalogue of its Arabic manuscripts. Aumer referred to Marcel's short description of the text in his *Histoire de l'Égypte* but did not mention its presumed provenance from Marcel's collection. We can in any case infer that the manuscript of *al-Alṭāf al-khafiyya* had been in Egypt until Marcel acquired it there, only traveling to Europe during the early nineteenth century, where it probably had (at least) two French owners before ending up in its present location in Munich. While the work would have contained several relevant documents and accounts for Quatremère's (quite extensively glossed) translation of al-Maqrīzī's work, it seems that it only came to his attention when he had already finished that project.

Unlike the preceding examples, the manuscript of *al-Rawḍ al-zāhir* preserved in the British Library does not tell us as much, if anything at all, about its European travels. The manuscript, which is of course missing its title page, only contains a two-line English description of the text on its flyleaf, which judging by the handwriting was likely written sometime in the late 19th or even early 20th century. The manuscript was however already part of the library at an earlier date than that, as the catalogue of Charles Rieu describing the text was published in 1846. Before that time, it is unknown how the manuscript traveled to Europe.

The last remaining text in a European library is Shāfiʿ's *al-Faḍl al-maʾthūr,* preserved in the Bodleian Library. The manuscript is part of the Marsh fund, a collection of over seven hundred manuscripts that belonged to the important clergyman Narcissus Marsh (d. 1713) before ending up in Oxford. Marsh's collection itself was quite eclectic, but by far the majority of it (70%) originated from the private collection of the Dutch orientalist Jacobus Golius, who had acquired manuscripts in modern-day Morocco, Aleppo, and Istanbul, both for the university library of Leiden and for his private collection. Some decades after his death his personal collection was auctioned and the majority of it (according to one claim, 270 of originally 407 manuscripts) was acquired by Marsh.[123] It is not entirely certain that this particular manuscript originates from

[122] MS Aumer 405, 183v. The note does not contain a name or date, but the handwriting is very different from that of a letter supposedly written and signed by Quatremère of which I found a sales listing on Ebay. See: *https://www.ebay.it/itm/3-LETTRES-AUTOGRAPHES-SIGNEES-DEtienne-Marc-QUATREMERE-Erudit-Orientaliste-/142771397783?hash=item213dd6a497* Last consulted May 8th, 2018. The orthography is also quite different (though likely contemporary) to that found in the handwritten draft volumes of Marcel's *Dictionnaire arabe des dialectes d'Afrique* preserved in the BnF (19 volumes Arabe 5150 to Arabe 5168).

[123] C. Wakefield "Arabic Manuscripts in the Bodleian Library: The Seventeenth-Century Collections", in *The 'Arabick' Interest of the Natural Philosophers in Seventeenth-Century England* (Brill: Leiden, 1993), 137; "Oriental manuscripts of Narcissus Marsh", in https://archiveshub.jisc.ac.uk/data/gb161-mss.marsh last consulted 11 July 2018. That webpage also informs us that other manuscripts from the Marsh collection came from the brothers Cunus (14 manuscripts), dr. Hallifax ("about ten"), and Dudley Loftus ("a few others"). The figures of 70% and 270 out of about 700 manuscripts of course do not compute. Further research would be necessary to

Golius' collection, although an argument in favour of this theory is that it does not bear any of the marks noted by Colin Wakefield for manuscripts of other provenance in the Marsh collection.[124] However, the last dated (but otherwise quite incomprehensible) consultation note in Arabic script is dated to 1058 / 1648, well after Golius' journey to the east between 1625 and 1629, after which he is reported to have acquired only very few new manuscripts.[125] I have furthermore not been able to locate the text either in the catalogue of Golius' personal manuscripts that was circulated prior to the sale,[126] or in the late seventeenth century union catalogue of manuscripts by Edward Bernard, which lists the manuscripts from the Marsh fund. However, this part of Bernard's catalogue is apparently mostly based on the sales catalogue because of the auction and the publication of the union catalogue occurring more or less at the same time.[127] We have to wait until a century later until the work shows up in the late eighteenth century catalogue of "oriental" manuscripts in the Bodleian library. The cataloguer A. Joanne Uri considered the work to be an anonymous history (despite the author's name being clearly written on the title page),[128] a mistake which was not corrected by A. Nicoll and E.B. Pusey's 1835 catalogue which contains a great deal of addenda to Uri's catalogue,[129] and in fact still stands uncorrected in the modern British online union catalogue Fihrist.[130]

We can be sure that the text did not randomly end up in the Marsh fund in Oxford however, for it bears the following Greek line written in classicizing orthography on its title page: "*παντaχου τγν α AγΘειαν",* which translates as "truth everywhere". This struck me as very enigmatic for a long time, until I found out that it was Narcissus Marsh'

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establish the truth of this issue, but, as will be shown below, it is not always easy to define the origins of Marsh's manuscripts.

[124] Wakefield "Arabic Manuscripts in the Bodleian Library", 145, notes 169-170.

[125] Witkam, *Jacobus Golius (1596-1667) en Zijn Handschriften*, 50.

[126] J. du Vivie, *Catalogus Insignium in omni facultate, linguisque, Arabica, Persica, Turcica, Chinensi &c. Librorum M.Ss. Quos Doctissimus Clarissimusque Vir D. Jacobus Golius, Dum Viveret: Mathesios & Arabicae Linguae in Acad. Lugd. Batav. Professor Ordinarius, Ex variis Regionibus magno studio, labore & sumptu, collegit. Quorum auctio habebitur in AEdibus Johannis du Vivie, Bibliopolae. Ad diem XVI. Octobris St. Novo, ad punctum horae nonae. Lugduni Batavorum, Apud Joannem du Vivie, 1696* (Leiden, 1696).

[127] E. Bernard, *Catalogi librorum manuscriptorum Angliae et Hibernae in unum collecti, cum indici alphabetico* (Oxon: Fitzherb Adams, 1697), vol 2, tome 2:61-65; Witkam, *Jacobus Golius,* 69-70.

[128] "Auctor anonymus Regi illi opus hoc nuncupavit." A. Joanne Uri, *Bibliothecae Bodleianae codicum manuscriptorum orientalium, videlicet Hebraicorum, Chaldaicorum, Syriacorum, Aethiopicorum, Arabicorum, Persicorum, Turcicorum, Copticorumque catalogus* (Oxon: Clarendon, 1787), 169 (manuscript number DCCLXVI, filed under "Historici in folio").

[129] The volume does "identify" the text with a "Sīrat al-Malik al-Manṣūr" mentioned by Ḥajjī Khalīfa as written by al-Qāḍī l-Fāḍil, and adds that "the same author" also wrote a "res gestae" of al-Ashraf Khalīl (note again the interesting identification of *sīra* as the historically important European genre "res gestae"). Of course, the text mentioned by Khalīfa is likely the misattributed *Tashrīf al-ayyām.* A. Nicoll & E.B. Pusey, *Catalogi codicum manuscriptorum orientalium Bibliothecae Bodleianae: Arabicos complectens, vol. 2* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1835), 595.

[130] https://www.fihrist.org.uk/catalog/manuscript_1109 last accessed 11 July 2018. I have submitted a correction to this entry.

personal Greek motto "which [he] inscibred on the fly-leaf of every book he possessed". The note was thus not specifically related to the text, but should be considered as an ex-libris.[131] Immediately below this note, another note likely also written by Narcissus Marsh renders the Latin title of the text as "Historia sultân melec Al-mansûr".[132] Clearly then, Marsh owned this manuscript and took the extra effort to identify its contents. Where and how he acquired it remains unclear however.

Beyond this social history of things applied to our manuscripts, we end up in the domain of modern scholarly research into these texts if we want to map their further adventures. It was in fact only by the late nineteenth century that one of our authors was "discovered" by a European historian: after some remarks by Max van Berchem about the necessity to study some of the sources used by al-Maqrīzī (whose work had become quite popular due to Quatremère's translation), P. Casanova published an article discussing Ibn ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir's life and the three preserved *sīra* manuscripts in London, Paris and Munich, as well as the related Paris manuscript of *Ḥusn al-manāqib*.[133] Only a few years later, Carl Brockelmann published the first volume of his monumental *Geschichte der Arabischen Litteratur,* which re-iterated Ibn ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir's authorship of the *sīra*'s of Baybars and al-Ashraf Khalīl and a number of other texts, though still noting *Faḍl* as an anonymous text.[134] The second volume which was published a few years later identified Shāfiʿ as the author of *Ḥusn al-manāqib,* although it notes the text as a "Prosaauszug aus b. ʿAbd-aẓẓâhir's [...] Biographie Baybars", which had earlier been described erroneously as a text "in Versen", despite the fact that Casanova had already clarified these issues.[135]

From these "early" engagements and classifications we can already see how these texts would come to be evaluated in the following decades: as fundamentally historiographical texts intimately related to practices of sultanic patronage. Furthermore, the early modern evaluation of *Tashrīf al-ayyām* as a text especially rich in documents would influence the text's further evaluation by many scholars thoroughly: several parts of it would be edited and translated as important extracts for the study of

[131] MS Bodleian Marsh 424, 1r. N.J.D. White, "Narcissus Marsh: Sermon preached in the Chapel of Trinity College, Dublin, on Trinity Monday, 1920", 2, in https://www.tcd.ie/Secretary/FellowsScholars/discourses/discourses/1920_Rev%20J%20D%20White_Narcissus%20Marsh.pdf I am grateful to Amber Ivanov, Sien De Groot, and Maria Tomadaki for deciphering and translating this note as well as offering some ideas on its possible provenance before I found out that Marsh left this ex-libris on most of his manuscripts.

[132] I am grateful to Maria O'Shea from the Marsh Library in Dublin for confirming that this is probably Narcissus Marsh' own handwriting. I am also grateful to Leen Bervoets and Els De Paermentier for their earlier palaeographic advice on this note.

[133] P. Casanova, "L'historien Ibn ʿAbd aḍh-Ḍhāhir", in *Mémoires publiés par les members de la Mission Archéologique française au Caire, vol. 6,* ed. M.U. Bouriant (Paris: Ernest Leroux, 1893), 493-505

[134] C. Brockelmann, *Geschichte der Arabischen Literatur, Erster Band* (Weimar: Emil Felber, 1898), 318-319.

[135] Brockelmann, *Geschichte der Arabischen Literatur, Zweiter Band* (Berlin: Emil Felber, 1902), 28.

the later period of the Crusades and diplomatic relations, whereas the work's general cohesiveness would be partly ignored. As the great "Mamluk" narrative of a state dominated by exogenous military slaves living detached lives from the indigenous populace would become ever more widespread, scholars would ever more strongly stress an interpretation of legitimisation, in which those alien rulers used local elites to justify their position on the throne, and these texts would be seen as prime examples of such practices. Yet, I hope to have shown throughout this dissertation that taking these works as exemplary of such a process is problematic: it partly misinterprets the authorial intentions behind producing these works, attaching a political and propagandistic purpose to these works which they likely never served in this form. The low attestation of these texts within the Islamic world itself furthermore highlights the problem discussed at the outset of this section: the fact that the intentions behind much European efforts of manuscript collection profoundly influenced the ways in which we today evaluate these sources and the period in which they were produced, for simple reasons of availability.[136] This does not mean that we are making a wrong choice in giving these texts sustained attention and that we should instead devote our time to those texts that were actually widely read, reproduced, and commented upon – in that sense, this whole dissertation would be a rather self-defeating endeavour – but that it is of the utmost importance to adequately contextualise texts and try to understand their internal structures, argumentation, ultimate intentions, and later reception as much as possible without being guided by preconceived ideas about the role of texts in the pre-modern Islamicate world.

[136] I should add that some of my ideas here are influenced by Elias Saba's comments made in his presentation "Centering Archives: A Different Approach for Mamluk Studies" at the *School of Mamluk Studies* conference in Ghent in July 2018.

Manuscript	Via	Present location
Istanbul Fatih 4366 (*Rawḍ*)	Royal library of Ottoman Sultan Maḥmūd I	Süleymaniye Library: probably since sometime after 1918 (founding of modern research library)
BL O/C Add. 23331 (*Rawḍ*)	Unknown	London: At least since 1846 (first catalogue listing)
BnF Arabe 1704 (*Tashrīf*)	0. Acquired by Elzéar in Egypt? 1. Private collection of Séguier (d. 1672) 2. Private collection of Du Camboust (d. 1732) 3. Abbey of Saint-Germain-des-Prés (until about 1792)	BnF Paris since about 1792
München Aumer 405 (*Alṭāf*)	1. Acquired in Egypt by Jean-Joseph Marcel between 1798-1801 => private collection of Marcel (d. 1854) 2. Private collection of Quatremère (d. 1857)	Staatsbibliothek München since 1858
BnF Arabe 1707 (*Ḥusn*)	Unknown	BnF Paris since 19th century
Bodleian Marsh 424 (*Faḍl*)	0. Acquired by Golius in early 17th century? 1. Private collection of Marsh (d. 1713)	Bodleian: At least since 1787 (first catalogue listing)
Bnf Arabe 1705 (*Sīrat al-Nāṣir Muḥammad*)	0. Acquired by Elzéar in Egypt? 1. Private collection of Séguier (d. 1672) 2. Private collection of Du Camboust (d. 1732) 3. Abbey of Saint-Germain-des-Prés (until about 1792)	BnF Paris since about 1792
Selimiye 2306 (*Tārīkh al-Malik al-Ẓāhir*)	Unknown	Edirne: at least since early twentieth century (1930s), but likely much earlier already

Table 6: Summary of manuscript travel

Conclusion

"The writing remains", and so it is with this small corpus of *sīra*'s: due the lucky survival of seven manuscripts, we have been able to form some kind of understanding of what two authors in late medieval Egypt tried to communicate. But it is clear that the "reader[s] of the handwriting" of these texts changed considerably throughout the centuries following their initial composition in the late seventh / thirteenth and early eighth / fourteenth centuries. Although the lavishly decorated manuscripts suggest that these objects were presumably offered initially to individuals with strong ties to the courtly environment, be they sultans, influential *kuttāb* or unknown other agents, we can surmise that they started circulating more widely afterwards, with various agents leaving marks of consultation on the pages of the text, and some of their narrative and documentary contents appearing in historiographical texts written by later authors. The travels of these manuscripts throughout the Islamic world and Europe remain largely obscure of course, and "listening to the story" of these manuscripts has often been more like trying to discern hushed whispers through thick layers of noise. If the above pages have only been able to partly reconstruct these travels, I do hope to have shown that studying these material elements is essential for understanding the reception and ultimately the social significance of our texts. A close reading of the frontispiece of *al-Faḍl al-maʾthur* for example greatly complicated the earlier much repeated idea that this text must have been offered to the sultan. For the other texts, reading the various manuscript notes also suggested a broader circulation than the courtly context in which these texts were traditionally situated. Even studying the diffuse European reception of these texts is highly relevant if we place it in the wider context of historical developments in and between the Middle East and Europe: they become as such small but in their own ways significant carriers of the colonial dominance and intellectual construction of "the Orient", which may in some ways still be said to be influential on the ways in which we evaluate that Orient's history and its political processes. As such, this chapter has been an epilogue of sorts to the criticism formulated at the outset of this dissertation in 1.2. that we should try to understand texts more on their own terms and within the cultural and especially linguistic contexts of meaning that produced them.

Final conclusions

تعجبت من أمر القرافة إذ غدت على وحشة الموتى بها قلبنا يصبو
فألفيتُها مأوى الأحبة كلّهم ومستوطن الأصحاب يصبو لهُ القلبُ

I marvelled at the graveyard's case when it became so
that our heart inclined to the desolation of the dead there
I found it a place of refuge for all those beloved
and a settlement of friends to which the heart aspires[1]

Let us return to that moment in time with which I started this dissertation: Shāfiʿ b. ʿAlī's poetical musings on old age, uttered in an exchange with the young al-Ṣafadī, only a short time before his actual death. These seem to be the words of acceptance of an old man who has led a life rich in experiences and achievements, who has seen many members of his generation pass away, among which at least three of his close family members. Of course, the subject matter and imagery dominating this exchange was in large part given in by the fact that the old Shāfiʿ and his young visitor al-Ṣafadī apparently stumbled on the subject of old age as an inspiring topic for their meeting, and do not necessarily literally represent our author's yearning for the grave and the company of the dead. Yet, it is tempting to imagine him as such: by now old and blind, sitting in a room surrounded by his book cases, recalling the various poems and books he wrote in earlier days, promptly adding a few extra verses just for the sake of the occasion. One wonders how he would look back on the three *sīra*'s he wrote which we have been able to read: did these represent failed ambitions for him, the writings of a younger, more ambitious version of himself, or did he still appreciate their contents? There may be a layer of bittersweet nostalgia here, but perhaps also one of satisfaction. Our author may not have reached the highest position in the chancery, but it is clear

[1] Al-Ṣafadī, *Aʿyān al-aṣr*, 2:504.

that he was respected by most of his peers as a masterful *adīb* and, unlike some of his peers, there is no indication that he was in financial trouble at any time. Furthermore, that he named all these works in his list of self-written books certainly suggests that he was prepared to take full responsibility for his authorship so many years later. Indeed, for one of these *sīra*'s (*al-Faḍl al-maʾthūr*, though it is only referred to as a *sīra* of Qalāwūn) he even added the note that "[its] merits are on the tongues of many citizens", implying that he considered the work to be well appreciated, quite contrary to the external evidence I presented in Chapter Seven.[2]

In the end, these poems also give some humanity to Shāfiʿ's personality. We know relatively little about this man's life, even compared to many of his contemporaries. We arguably know even less about his uncle, despite more of his writing having survived. These were no unimportant literary agents of the period, and to some degree they were appreciated in later times, but clearly their fame was not lasting. Unlike Baybars, who is still widely remembered in the Arab world and even beyond, the names of our authors do not ring bells anymore beyond a small circle of scholars interested in their historical information. This can be partly explained by the fickleness of memory and history's unpredictable turns, but also simply by the quality of what our authors wrote. These texts have engaged a decent amount of readers throughout the centuries, but they were never of leading importance in anyone's eyes, unlike some other semi-contemporary historians whose works are read extensively to this day.

What can a small corpus of six not very widely circulated texts tell us about literary culture of late medieval Egypt and Syria then? And what about these poems about old age and death which I have started and ended with? Despite the fact that the poems seem to have little to do with the actual corpus of texts studied, both types of texts are strongly representative of the literary world within which our authors wrote. I have argued that these texts were ultimately meant to be communicative, in the sense that they invited their readers to engage with their contents, to marvel at the narrative and linguistic virtuosity applied to the specific subject of a sultan's relationship to his *kātib*. For that is the central relationship being presented in these texts, always implicitly through the textual negotiation of time by way of which our authors embedded their authorial personality in their texts – Ricoeur's three-part *mise-en-intrigue* – and often also explicitly, by way of compiled documents and poems, discussions of the importance of *kuttāb* in the sultan's *dawla,* or via anecdotes in which the *kātib*'s actions were shown to be essential for a happy end to political events. Or to reiterate Ibn ʿAbd al-Ẓāhir's quite explicit words, "no *dawla* whatsoever could exist without a chronicler to write down its accounts and entrust its traces to paper" (see 4.2.1. for its context): the *sīra*'s

[2] Al-Ṣafadī, *Aʿyān al-aṣr,* 2:507. المتضمنها جزء واحد التي حسنتها على ألسنة الرعايا متعددة

were the ultimate proof of this major claim, for they textually translated the sultan's life. The reasons why they did so was to showcase these claims to their peers and to negotiate their position within the literary field. The ambitions of the poems about death are much more humble of course, but they too showed authors eager to display their rhetorical inventiveness in a very specific area and in a profoundly relational context: they were explicitly improvised to provoke response and to engage an opponent in improvising an apposite variation of the other's theme and meaning (both "*maʿnā*").

It should be clear from the preceding pages that I believe these texts were *particular* engagements with historiographical and literary idioms of the period. Yet, even if they were somewhat singular and specific in their approach to writing about the life and rule of a sultan, I have also demonstrated that these were no revolutionary texts either: the interpretation of *sīra* by our authors was not a new development, but one that made perfect sense within the ways in which various contemporary authors engaged with the inheritance of seven centuries of Arabic textual practice. Perhaps the importance of this dissertation lies in the fact that it is one of few detailed engagements with the life and works of particular authors, showcasing how this close reading technique reveals a lot of information that is too easily glossed over when merely consulting these works for a particular bit of information with an earlier scholar's general interpretation in mind. I hope to have demonstrated the importance of this close approach to studying historiography, and contributed to a small contemporary surge of such studies, as evidenced by the works of Konrad Hirschler, Elias Muhanna, and a growing list of studies on the life and texts of al-Maqrīzī.[3]

The last chapter of this dissertation has furthermore highlighted how we should be very careful in interpreting statements about the social performance of texts as expressed in the texts themselves. While I have not been able to completely disprove the hypothesis that these texts were offered to the sultan, I have highlighted in which ways this is really not much more than a hypothesis as neither the manuscripts as social objects nor the textual contents provide any clear cut information about such practices and instead even suggest other channels of performance and reception. Furthermore, I have challenged the still all too common legitimisation narrative and offered some perspectives on how we might more fruitfully conceive of patronage and courtly textual production as a multidirectional, especially reciprocal effort by which agents negotiated

[3] Hirschler, *Medieval Arabic Historiography*; Muhanna, *The World in a Book*; Van Steenbergen, *Caliphate and Kingship* and the Bibliotheca Maqriziana series in general (Frédéric Bauden's Maqriziana articles should also be mentioned). More such studies are being undertaken as we speak, so we may start to speak of an important shift of focus in the field from the historical-critical interest in the "factual information" given by historians about their times, to more specific engagements with the writing of historiography by specific authors.

their social positions within the field, and within which we should interpret the production of *sīra* foremost.

Three hundred pages later there is still work to be done. We know that Shāfiʿ wrote many more texts than the three of which we have by now identified manuscripts. More may perhaps be found in the various libraries and archives of the world, listed as misidentified or as anonymous texts or simply not catalogued at all. If this one find of an as yet undiscovered text shows anything, it is that students and scholars alike should return to these libraries and archives and engage with the manuscripts found there, instead of relying entirely on editions, some of which I have shown to be quite problematic if one wants to read their accounts in detail. There are also other *sīra*'s than the ones from the close-knit corpus I have engaged with, some of which I have referred to in passing, but all of which seem to be quite different types of texts, in which *sīra* was interpreted and written in different ways. These and other historiographical texts invite future research by way of the close reading approach used in this study. Further studies may even disclose more commonalities of these later traditions and the interpretation of *sīra* by our two authors than I have allowed in my interpretation here. A cursory overview as well as earlier studies would suggest that these later texts used differing approaches, in which the historiographical-chronographical focus loses in importance while the panegyrical and virtue-focused approach gains a more central position in works that make the *istiṭrād* ("digression") principle a central element of their endeavour.

For our authors, who knew each other intimately as members of the same family, *sīra* meant something very particular, and in a way also something very personal. It was their way of making sense of a sultan's life and reign, of the chaos of history, but also of their own experiences in serving or at least living under the rule of the sultan whose life they depicted. Perhaps most importantly, it was their way of trying to secure benefit from important patrons by showcasing their mastery of specific literary discourses: they used this form to negotiate their social position at or in relation to court, the chancery, and their general peers. In the case of Shāfiʿ, who likely did not hold a position in the chancery after having become blind due to a dramatic accident in relatively young age, we may even imagine him trying to prove that blindness did not hinder his eloquence and productivity. Al-Mutanabbī, that panegyrical poet of towering influence whom our authors took as an inspiration, and whose famous words they instrumentaled in their own narratives, at one point boastfully exclaimed that "I am the one whose *adab* the blind sees!" If we return to imagining the blind Shāfiʿ in old age, remembering his literary career, we might think of him not only as longing for the peace of a final resting place, but also as it were exclaiming proudly: "I am the blind whose *adab* the seeing read!"

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[1] Square brackets denote presumed titles which do not appear on the manuscripts themselves.

[2] This work has been edited, but I have not been able to consult the edition.

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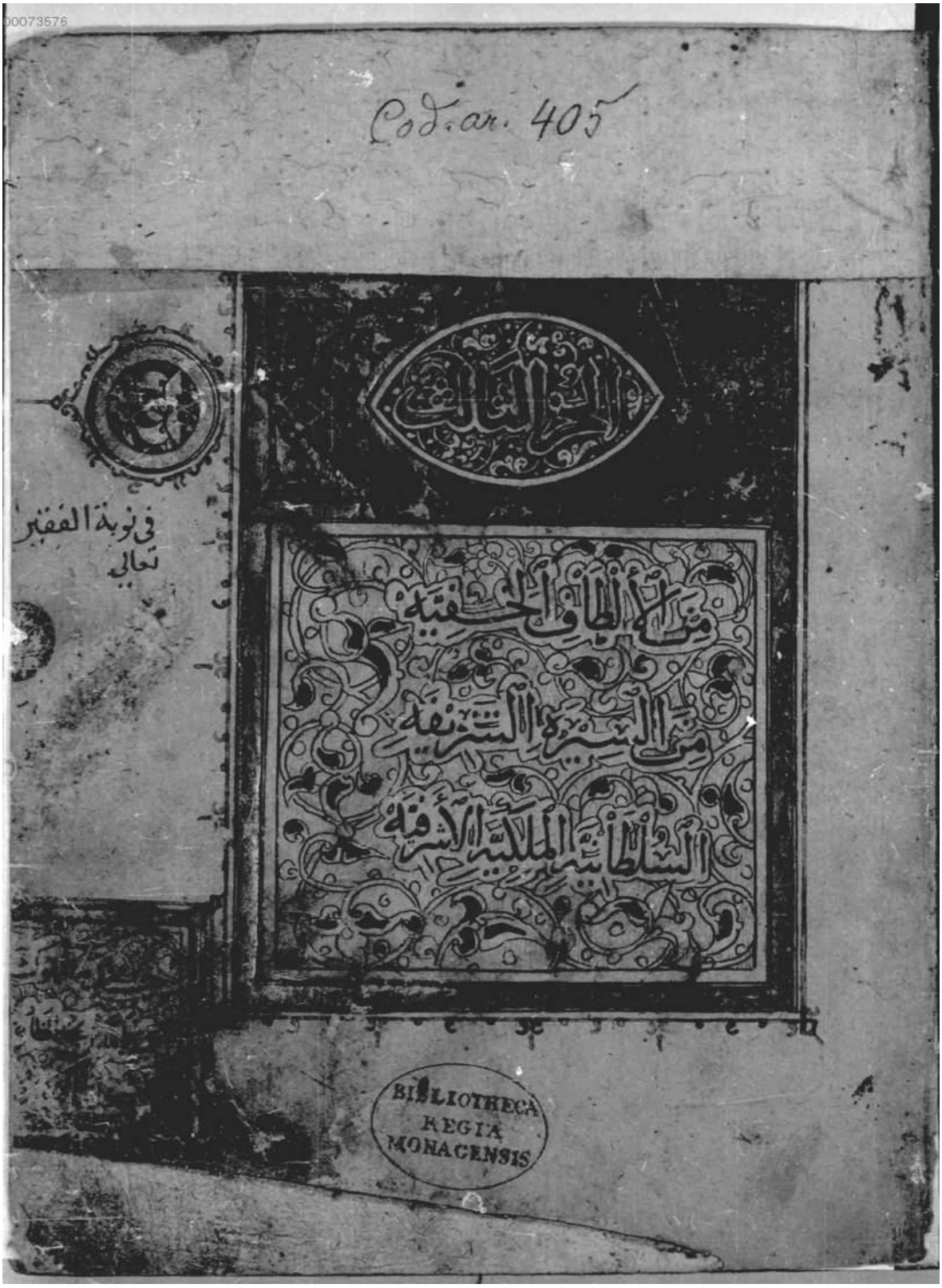
Appendix A: Manuscript Title pages

Bodleian Marsh 424, folio 1r. (*al-Faḍl al-maʾthūr*)

BnF Arabe 1707, folio 1r. (*Tashrīf al-ayyām*)

Staatsbibliothek Munich, Cod. Arab. 405, folio 1r. (*al-Alṭāf al-khafiyya*)



Selimiye Kütüphanesi, 2306 (*Tārīkh al-Malik al-Ẓāhir*)[1]

[1] Special thanks to Rana Khodayari for helping me contact the personnel of the Selimiye library.

Appendix B: Folio's 123r-123v of "Tawārīkh mulūk al-islām" (BnF Arabe 2309)

تواريخ ملوك الاسلام الدولة الصالحيه

ملك الملك الصالح نجم الدين ايوب

ملك المعز ديار مصر سنه ثمان واربعين وستمايه وفي تلك السنه ملك الناصر دمشق وفات المعز سنه اربعه وخمسين وستمايه وفيها ملك ولده المنصور ☆

ملك الملك المظفر ديار مصر سنه ثمان وخمسين وستمايه كسر المظفر التتر على عين جالوت سنه ثمان وخمسين وستمايه وقتل الملك المظفر في رمل مصر سنه ثمان وخمسين وستمايه

الدولة الظاهرية ملك الملك الظاهر ديار مصر
والشام سنة ثمان وخمسين وستمايه وملك البيره سنة
ستين وملك الكرك وحمص سنة احدى وستين وستمايه وفتح
قيساريه وارصوف سنة ثلاثة وستين وستما يه وغار
عساكره على سنين وكان المقدم على الجيش صاحب حماه
واسر وابن صاحب سنين سنه اربعه وستين وستمايه
وفتح صفد ويافا سنه في تلك السنه وفتح الشقيف وا
نطاكيه سنه ستة وستين وستمايه وحاصر حصن الاكرا د
وملكه وعكا وصافيتا سنة تسعه وستين وستما يه
دخل بلد سنين في ثلاثة وسبعين وستمايه دخل بلد الروم
سنه خمسه وسبعين وستمايه وفات الملك الظاهر وملك
ولده الملك السعيد سنه ستة وسبعين وستمايه وفات
الملك السعيد سنه ثمان وسبعين وستمايه الدولة المنصوريه
ملك الملك المنصور قلاون الالفي ديار مصر والشام سنة
ثمان وسبعين وستمايه كسر الملك المنصور التتر على حمص
سنه ثمانين وستما يه
وفات الملك المنصور صاحب حماه سنة ثلاثة وثمانين وستمايه
فتح الملك المنصور قلاون حصن المرقب سنه اربعه وثمانين وستمايه

وفتح حصن الاكراد وحاصر عكا وصافيتا